



## GENOCIDE PREVENTION TASK FORCE

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January 28, 2010

Dear colleagues:

It has now been a year since the conclusion of the official work of the Genocide Prevention Task Force. On this occasion, we would like to update you on the response to the task force report by the administration, Congress, and the non-governmental sector, as well as some ongoing efforts to promote the report's recommendations. Over the last year, the task force report has proven to be an impetus for a number of U.S. government actions, and where progress is lacking, the report continues to be the touchstone for debate about how to improve our ability to prevent genocidal violence.

#### *The Obama administration*

The task force urged the incoming president to demonstrate from the outset that preventing genocide is a national priority. Although President Obama has not yet taken most of the tangible steps that the task force recommended as ways of demonstrating such commitment—an early executive order, focus on genocide prevention in the inaugural or State of the Union addresses, and a presidential directive on genocide prevention—there are several signs of progress by the administration:

- In commemoration of the Holocaust Days of Remembrance last April, President Obama spoke of his “commitment as President” to “[do] everything we can to prevent and end atrocities like those that took place in Rwanda, those taking place in Darfur.” In his Nobel remarks, the president stated, “More and more, we all confront difficult questions about how to prevent the slaughter of civilians by their own government,” and declared, “We must develop alternatives to violence that are tough enough to change behavior” for “those who violate international law by brutalizing their own people. When there is genocide in Darfur; systematic rape in Congo; or repression in Burma – there must be consequences.”
- Other senior administration officials have spoken about the importance of preventing genocide and lauded the task force report.
  - Vice President Biden gave a speech at an event hosted by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) last April echoing key themes of the task force report, including asserting that preventing genocide is a high national security priority for the United States.

- U.S. Ambassador to the UN Susan E. Rice commended the authors and sponsors of the task force at a December 2009 event at USHMM, calling the report “a powerful and thoughtful and comprehensive treatment of a very important issue, which...I certainly find valuable as a policymaker.”
- In December 2009, in a speech about democracy and human rights, Secretary of State Clinton said, "We will work to identify ways that we and our partners can enhance human security, while at the same time focusing greater attention on efforts to prevent genocide elsewhere [i.e., beyond Sudan]."
- The same week, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Mike Posner wrote in a public online discussion, "Last Friday I met with 30 experts on this issue at the Holocaust Museum. The museum was one of the sponsors of the Genocide Prevention Task Force. I received a number of very good recommendations from this group on how to implement the recommendations in the report. We are now working with the National Security Council on next steps; this is a high priority."
- As Assistant Secretary Posner hinted, a proposal to create an interagency committee dedicated to atrocities prevention—akin to the task force’s proposed Atrocities Prevention Committee—is reportedly working its way through the National Security Council staff. Meanwhile, we understand there are efforts to gather people at the working level for an informal interagency genocide prevention working group.
- We have heard unofficially that the forthcoming National Security Strategy will identify genocide as a threat to U.S. national security and its prevention as an important objective, as recommended by the task force report.
- In response to a letter from Sen. Feinstein accompanying the task force report, Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair committed to act on most of the task force’s recommendations on early warning, including preparing a coordinated national intelligence product addressing countries at risk of genocide in the next three-to-five years and agreeing to highlight countries at risk of genocide in his annual threat assessment testimony to Congress.

### *Congress*

- The omnibus appropriations bill passed in December 2009 included \$50 million in a new Complex Crises Fund, which is consistent with (if for somewhat broader purposes than) the task force’s recommendation for a fund of the same size for urgent off-cycle projects. The same bill appropriated additional funds aimed at “enhancing diplomatic capacity and readiness”—money for 745 new positions at State and 300 at USAID, plus \$150 million for the Civilian Response Corps—in line with the task force’s recommendation to enhance capacity to engage in urgent preventive diplomatic action.
- Last June, the House passed the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, which included language from Rep. Berman specifically referring to the Task Force report and requiring the administration to submit a report “outlining specific plans for the development of a government-wide strategy and the strengthening of United States civilian capacities for preventing genocide and mass atrocities against civilians.” Though the Senate has not moved its version of the authorization bill forward, we understand that Sen. Kerry’s office is exploring options for including language on genocide prevention as well.
- On October 1, 2009, Sens. Feingold and Feinstein wrote a letter to National Security Advisor James L. Jones, copied to the Secretary of State, “to inquire what steps [he] and the Obama administration are taking” with respect to preventing mass atrocities. The senators specifically inquired whether Gen.

Jones planned to create an Atrocities Prevention Committee or similar working group in the National Security Council, as the task force had recommended. As of the time of writing, Sens. Feingold and Feinstein had not received a formal reply from the administration.

*The non-governmental sector*

The most enthusiastic response to the task force report may have come from the community of NGOs, activists and policy advocates, who have embraced the recommendations as a blueprint for change.

- Advocacy on behalf of the Task Force recommendations by an NGO coalition spearheaded by the Friends Committee on National Legislation, Oxfam America, the Genocide Intervention Network, Human Rights First and others, has begun. This coalition is gearing up for a major advocacy push in early 2010 with the task force’s proposals forming the heart of its agenda.
- The American Bar Association’s House of Delegates formally endorsed the task force report at its annual meeting in August. The ABA Center for Human Rights is now developing ideas for how the ABA can promote the task force’s recommendations, particularly the creation of a network of like-minded international actors to exchange information about the risks of genocide and mass atrocities.
- *The Will to Intervene*, a project in Canada co-chaired by Gen. Romeo Dallaire, echoed several of the GPTF recommendations in outlining how the U.S. and Canadian governments can enhance their capacity to prevent mass atrocities. The report is one of a variety of scholarly studies that have cited the task force’s work favorably.

Our work remains far from finished. Despite real progress, several key recommendations do not appear to have gained traction so far. We will continue to raise awareness about the task force’s report, delve into the conceptual and policy challenges related to preventing genocide, and co-organize periodic discussions on these issues with U.S. government officials and other interested parties. We welcome your thoughts on how we can keep the work of the task force “alive” in the ongoing policy debates in and outside of government. Please do not hesitate to contact us at your convenience.

Sincerely,



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