

Why the World Needs the Budapest Centre for the International Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities

By Dr. Professor Gregory H. Stanton¹

We meet this morning to inaugurate the Budapest Centre for the International Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities. We create an institution that will live beyond the life of this government, and probably beyond the life-span of most of us here. It is up to us to fill it with the life that will make it the force it needs to be.

Genocides, politicides, and other forms of mass killing by governments and non-state actors killed over 200 million people in the twentieth century – far more than all the wars combined. For most of the twentieth century, these killings were dismissed because of the Westphalian doctrine of state sovereignty (or should we call it state impunity?), ideological utopianism (Nazism and Communism), imperialism, and the convenient cover of war, either civil or international. Genocide was treated as an unpredictable catastrophe, like a volcanic eruption, a tsunami, or an earthquake.

But in the last twenty years, two paradigmatic revolutions have occurred. Francis Deng stood sovereignty on its head in his pioneering work that became known in the Evans-Sahnoun Report as “The Responsibility to Protect.” Applying the doctrines of popular sovereignty that were the basis of the American and French revolutions, Deng said that states exist to protect the rights of their people. If they do not fulfill this primary duty, or worse, trample upon it by committing genocide against their own citizens, the international community, acting through the UN, regional organizations, or even through coalitions, has a responsibility to protect the rights of those citizens. Our responsibilities do not end at the borders of our nation states.

The second paradigmatic revolution was the application of social science analysis to the phenomenon of genocide. Political scientists, anthropologists, sociologists, and historians studied genocides and proved there are predictable risk factors, stages, and triggers of genocide and politicide. Unlike a volcano or an earthquake, where we know the fault lines, but cannot predict when the catastrophe will come, these risk factors can be predicted with enough precision that policy makers can take steps to avert genocides. Genocides do not occur by accident. They are caused by human will, and can be prevented by human will.

Barbara Harff² has shown that six risk factors correlate with high probability of genocide or politicide:

1. Unpunished past genocides or politicides (impunity);
2. Totalitarian or authoritarian government;
3. An exclusionary ideology among the ruling elite that excludes whole groups from fundamental human rights;
4. Rule by an ethnically exclusive elite;
5. Systematic persecution of scapegoat groups through torture, discrimination, and other violations of basic human rights;
6. A closed society – to outside trade and outside ideas.

Harff has also shown that specific triggers are likely to set off a genocide.

Heinz Krumpal has used empirical data collected by Swisspeace to demonstrate that these risk factors can result in conflict in numerous societies; and Berger Heldt of Uppsala University has shown that certain factors are crucial in aggravating or reducing conflicts between groups.

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² See: Barbara Harff and Ted Robert Gurr, Assessing Country Risks of Genocide and Politicide in 2009, at <http://www.genocidewatch.org/aboutgenocide/articlesongenocide.html>

Gregory Stanton of Genocide Watch has developed a processual analysis of genocide, called the Eight Stages of Genocide, that is designed to allow policy makers to know what steps to take to prevent or stop each of the fundamental logical steps of the genocidal process.³

Daniel Jonah Goldhagen has demonstrated that genocides aren't simply caused by genocidal leaders – they arise in cultures with histories of exclusion and persecution of minority groups.⁴ But he agrees with Benjamin Valentino that without genocidal leaders or hate groups, genocides cannot be organized.⁵ Both advocate concentration on leaders to prevent genocide. Targeted diplomacy and sanctions are one approach. Goldhagen even advocates issuing bounties for arrest and trial of genocidal leaders. The logical correlate is that if the genocidal leader resists arrest by force of arms, he will be killed. Goldhagen doesn't answer all the questions about who would have the authority to issue such bounties or deploy commandos to carry them out, but he doesn't think it is likely to be the United Nations.

In 2000, I wrote a paper proposing the creation of a Special Adviser to the UN Secretary General for the Prevention of Genocide. The International Campaign to End Genocide lobbied at the U.N. for creation of that position, and in 1994 Kofi Annan appointed Juan Mendez as the first Special Adviser. He has now been succeeded by Francis Deng, the author of the concept of The Responsibility to Protect. Dr. Deng is assisted by a staff of seven. The Office has taken on the primary role of training governments in countries at risk of the early warning signs of genocide, and steps that can be taken to prevent it.

The second part of my paper in 2000 advocated the creation of a Genocide Prevention Center like the one we are creating today. I realized that the UN Special Adviser would be limited by his location in United Nations politics, and would even be prevented from calling a genocide by its proper name. What was needed was an authoritative monitoring agency that is not part of the UN, but that maintains a special relationship with the UN Special Adviser's Office and with UN member states. In other words, a Genocide Prevention Center whose objectivity would be respected by all, but would not be limited in its ability to declare early warnings when needed, and to recommend policies of prevention that might incur disapproval from member states in the United Nations.

Until the creation of this Centre today, no objective state - authorized centers on genocide prevention have existed. Various groups, such as the Genocide Prevention Advisory Group, Genocide Watch, the International Campaign to End Genocide (including the International Crisis Group, the Minority Rights Group, Survival International, and the Aegis Trust) as well as regionally specific groups like Enough have monitored the world for early warning signs of genocide. But none had the official status that the Budapest Centre will have.

The Centre we inaugurate today will need to develop special relationships with the UN Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide, with NATO, the OECD, the African Union, ECOWAS, the Organization of American States and other regional organizations. For the Centre to have authority, it must be staffed by the best genocide prevention experts in the world.

Why must the Budapest Centre have such authority? Because the default position of governments in foreign policy is non-action. Governments assume that unless the probability of genocide can be proven beyond a reasonable doubt, no action should be taken. And even when genocide is clearly underway, as it has been in Rwanda and Darfur, the default position remains non-action. Perhaps this position is understandable. Governments are most concerned about the direct economic and political interests of

³ Stanton, Gregory, The Eight Stages of Genocide, at <http://www.genocidewatch.org/aboutgenocide/8stagesofgenocide.html>

⁴ Goldhagen, Daniel, *Worse Than War*, Public Affairs Press, 2009.

⁵ Valentino, Benjamin, *Final Solutions*, Cornell, 2004.

their own citizens. Getting them concerned with a possible genocide on the other side of the world is extraordinarily difficult. Slovic and others have proven just how difficult.⁶

Today I want to propose another paradigm revolution: adoption of what epidemiologists call The Precautionary Principle. Simply put, it means “better safe than sorry.” Translated into public health terms, it means that if the risk of a public health disaster is sufficiently catastrophic, and indicators show the disaster is beginning, then the burden of proof on those claiming the catastrophe will happen shifts over to those who claim it will not happen. If the risks of a bird flu epidemic would be catastrophic, and bird flu turns up among chickens in Hong Kong, preventive action must be taken to prevent the epidemic from spreading. So all the chickens are slaughtered in Hong Kong.

Applied to genocide, which is surely a catastrophic event in which 800,000 human beings may die in a hundred days, if the early warning signs are strong enough, the hate radio broadcasts are increasing, the machetes have been imported, and the killer militias are in training, the international community has a responsibility to take forceful action. It should warn the leaders of the genocidal forces that they must stop incitements to genocide or they will be arrested. Their international bank accounts should be frozen and diplomatic rights restricted. Church and civil society groups in their countries should step up campaigns of anti-genocide education. And international troops on the scene should be reinforced, rather than withdrawn.

This Precautionary Principle shifts the burden of proof from those who claim a genocide may happen to those who claim it will not happen. If a genocide does begin, bounties should be issued for the arrest of those leading the genocide. Now that we have an International Criminal Court with jurisdiction over 113 nations, such persons may find themselves flown directly to the Hague.

The Budapest Centre need not determine who should have the authority to impose such sanctions or issue such arrest warrants. But let’s consider who should, because our current international system of deterring perpetrators of genocide isn’t working very well.

1. The U.N. Security Council is one possible locus for such authoritative decision. To date it has nearly always been paralyzed. Count all the resolutions on Darfur. But there have been a few times when UN preventive action has been effective – Macedonia and East Timor are the best examples. When a UN member state steps forward and volunteers to lead a force to stop a genocide, as Australia did in 1999 in East Timor, the UN Security Council will often authorize the intervention after the fact.

2. Where the acts of genocide occur in a state that is a party to the ICC Statute, the International Criminal Court may step in and issue arrest warrants, as it did very recently for a leader of the mass rapes in the Eastern Congo, who was arrested at his home in France.

3. Regional organizations like NATO, the African Union, or ECOWAS may step in. The atrocities in Sierra Leone were finally stopped through the combined action of ECOWAS and British commando units invited to intervene by the Sierra Leone government.

The key word we must stress for the Budapest Centre is legitimacy. How can conclusions reached by experts at the Budapest Centre be made fast enough and reach the right government decision makers so they can affect world policy?

First, the Budapest Centre must be funded by the European Union, not just by the Hungarian government. It should be led by top officials and not just become another academic think tank. Its Board of Directors should be chaired by people of the stature of Javier Solana, and include major leaders like Martti Ahtissari, Louise Arbour, Kofi Annan, Emma Bonino, Jan Pronk, Oscar Arias, Wangari Maathai, and Vaclav Havel. (Note, by the way, that many of these people have already been honored by the Central European University.)

⁶ Slovic, Paul, et.al., *Psychic Numbing and Genocide*, 2007.

Second, it must be supported by a wealthy and influential Finance Committee, chaired, I would suggest, by George Soros himself, and including Warren Buffett, and major financiers from Europe and Asia.

Third, it must be staffed by the best genocide scholars in the world, with one group on a permanent basis, and another on a regular visiting basis. It should include annual Fellows, like those at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC. In conjunction with the Central European University's Program in International Criminal Justice, it could support scholars pursuing doctorates in genocide studies and prevention.

Fourth, NATO and foreign policy planners should be integrated into the Centre's programs and seminars from the start, with regular programs on countries and issues of concern.

Fifth, the Centre should work with churches, Islamic, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, and other religious institutions to develop training materials and programs for developing anti-genocidal cultures.

Sixth, the Centre should develop links with other university programs around the world, and become a clearing house for research on genocide studies and prevention.

Seventh, the Centre should offer summer training programs for students on genocide studies and prevention for which they could obtain credit at their own universities.

The Budapest Centre should become a world center for scholarship, policy analysis and advocacy.

Today the Centre is born. But institutionalization is only a first step. The Centre is still an infant that needs feeding, exercise, and growth. It must be funded, staffed, and develop channels of communication – both to gather information and to disseminate policy recommendations.

As the Centre grows and establishes its legitimacy, we hope it will contribute significantly to the international campaign to end genocide.