

How Can We Prevent Genocide?

Speech given by Dr. Gregory Stanton at the Raphael Lemkin Centenary Conference, London, 18 October 2000. Sponsored by the Leo Kuper Foundation, London, England. ©2000 Gregory H. Stanton.

We are gathered today to celebrate the life of Raphael Lemkin, a man whose devotion changed the world. He did not become rich or famous during his lifetime. Yale Law School had no permanent position for him on its faculty. Many diplomats disdained his single-minded crusade as “overzealous,” and a threat to the system of state sovereignty that had reigned since the Treaty of Westphalia, as indeed it was. But faced with the horrors of the Holocaust, the United Nations finally saw for a moment that he was right; that genocide – this crime that Churchill called “the crime without a name” – should be outlawed. Raphael Lemkin named it, and devoted his life to making it a crime under international law.

When the word “genocide” was first used officially in the Nuremberg indictments – an anniversary we commemorate today – a trial began that would shake the world’s faith in the upward progress of the human race from barbarism, and would prove that all people, all cultures, all civilizations are capable of committing this terrible crime. When the Genocide Convention was passed by the United Nations in 1948, the world said, “Never again.” But the history of the twentieth century instead proved that “never again” became “again and again.” The promise the United Nations made was broken, as again and again, genocides and other forms of mass murder killed 170 million people, more than all the international wars of the twentieth century combined. Why? Why are there still genocides? Why are there genocidal massacres going on right now in southern Sudan by the Sudanese government against Dinka, Nuer, and Nuba; in eastern Burma by the Burmese government against the Karen; in the Democratic Republic of the Congo by both government and rebel forces against Tutsis, Banyamulenge, Hutus, Hema, and Lendu? Why has ethnic and religious hatred again reached the boiling point in Israel and Palestine; the Maluku Islands, Sri Lanka and Kashmir?

In order to prevent genocide, we must first understand it. We must study and compare genocides and develop a working theory about the genocidal process. There are many Centers for the Study of Genocide that are doing that vital work – in Montreal, New Haven, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Jerusalem, and now in Nottingham by the Aegis Trust, represented on this panel by Stephen Smith.

In 1998, in a paper I presented to the Yale Program on Genocide Studies, I proposed a structural theory of the genocidal process, describing the stages that all genocides I have studied have gone through. As a policy-maker with the U.S. State Department at the time, I was also naturally interested in what steps could be taken at each stage to stop the process. I made a number of practical suggestions about using the institutions the world had available at the end of the twentieth century. I will briefly summarize that paper here and attach a summary as an appendix to this paper. ([See Appendix 1.](#))

Underlying the social theory of my paper is an image of “ethno-centric man.” It seems that because all people grow up and live in particular cultures, speaking particular languages, they identify some people as “us” and others as “them.” This fundamental first stage in the process does not necessarily lead to genocide. Genocide only becomes possible with another common human tendency – considering only “our group” as human, and “de-humanizing” the others. We thus not only develop cultural centers. We also create cultural boundaries that shut other groups out, and may become the boundaries where solidarity ends and hatred begins.

We are seeing this phenomenon right now in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is a symbolic center for Jews, Muslims, and Christians. It is heavily loaded with religious significance and its control has, through the centuries, become a definitional indicator of cultural identity and domination. It has been the scene of many genocides and ethnic cleansings, including the Biblical deportation of the Jews to Babylon, and later their Diaspora by the Romans, the mass murder of its Islamic inhabitants by Christian Crusaders, and the exclusion of Jews from the Old City and Temple Mount by Muslims. When Israel was created, this volatile combination of religious-centrism and boundary-maintaining exclusion resulted in a U.N. Resolution to “internationalize” the city. If the U.N. had had the strength to enforce the resolution, perhaps it would have been a good idea. But neither the Israelis nor the Arabs ever accepted it. So we have the current situation, which has moved up the scale of stages of the genocidal process to at least stage five – polarization – and possibly to stage six, identification of

Arab militant leaders who are being gunned down by snipers with silencers, while Israeli soldiers are captured and lynched by Arab mobs. It is not genocide yet (stage seven), but it is very, very close. If Saddam Hussein and the Hezbollah had their way, genocide – a new Holocaust – would begin.

Note that I said, “if the U.N had had the strength to enforce the resolution, perhaps it would have been a good idea.” But what if the U.N. Security Council had passed a resolution to implement a peace agreement, and sent in peace-keepers, but then a genocide began? That is what happened in Rwanda. There was plenty of early warning. The UNAMIR commander, General Romeo Dallaire learned of the plans for the genocide three months before it began, had conclusive evidence of massive shipments of half a million machetes to arm the killers, and knew of the training camps for the Interahamwe genocidists. Yet when he cabled the U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations requesting authorization to confiscate the machete caches, Kofi Annan’s deputy Iqbal Riza refused, claiming it exceeded UNAMIR’s mandate. Then when the genocide actually began in April, General Dallaire desperately asked for a Chapter Seven mandate and reinforcements to protect the thousands of Tutsis who had taken refuge in churches and stadiums. Led by the U.S., the Security Council instead voted to pull out all 2800 UNAMIR troops. General Dallaire has since said that even those troops could have saved hundreds of thousands of lives.

There are two reasons why genocide is still committed in the world:

1. The world has not developed the international institutions needed to prevent it.
2. The world’s leaders do not have the political will to stop it.

Studying genocide is not enough. Our next task should be to create the international institutions and political will to end it. There are three key institutions that must be created, and two others that must be reformed.

1. The U.N. Security Council needs a strong, independent Early Warning system to predict where and when ethnic conflict, genocide, and war are going to occur, and to present policy options to the Security Council on how to prevent or stop the conflicts. The recent report made by the special commission on U.N. Peace-keeping makes just such a recommendation, and it should be implemented and given as much independence as the U.N. system permits. Meanwhile, we NGO’s should establish our own, fully independent Early Warning network that can provide daily reports and regular policy options papers. I spent four months this year working on such an open source, unclassified reporting capacity, providing daily reports to the State Department, U.N., and interested governments. Genocide Watch hopes to raise the money to make this an ongoing service. It will become a clearing house for reports from many human rights groups as well as open sources from around the world. The open secret of the new information age is that policy-makers would get better intelligence if they read the New York Times or London Times daily, the Economist weekly, and used the Internet, than if they counted on their embassies’ classified cables.

2. The United Nations needs a standing, volunteer, professional rapid response force that does not depend on member governments’ contributions of brigades from their own armies. Articles 43 through 48 of the U.N. Charter already provide for a permanent command structure, which has never been created, and a liberal interpretation of those articles would also permit creation of a standing army. The Standing High Readiness Brigade organized by the Danes, Canadians, Dutch and others is a step in the right direction, though it still depends on national contingents. A standing U.N. force will have to have the support of at least some of the major military powers, must be large enough to effectively intervene in situations like Rwanda, and should be composed of volunteers from around the world, the best of the best, who train together specifically for U.N. peace-keeping. Jesse Helms and the Know-Nothing Right would undoubtedly oppose such a force, and he has made it a condition for U.S. payment of its U.N. assessments that such a force not be created. But Jesse won’t live forever. In fact, as far as I can tell, he still lives in the Nineteenth Century, a monument to modern taxidermy. He doesn’t represent the majority of Americans. When polled, two-thirds of the American people favor creation of such a U.N. force. And over eighty percent favor American involvement in a force to stop genocide. This year, I helped draft a Congressional resolution calling for such a U.N. Security and Police Force, which is now co-sponsored by dozens of Congressmen. It is an idea whose time will come.

3. The world needs and will soon have an International Criminal Court. Impunity for genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity must end. The ICC must be backed by the will of nations to arrest those it

indicts. The ICC may not deter every genocidist, but it will put on warning every future tyrant who believes he can get away with mass murder. In 1999 and 2000 I served as the Coordinator of the Washington Working Group on the International Criminal Court. Despite the irresponsible position of my own U.S. government, which is still advocating impunity for official acts of government officials (a position that would have immunized every tyrant of the last century), the ICC will have the required sixty ratifications by the end of 2002, and the world will enter a new era of international justice, an era already envisioned by Raphael Lemkin in 1948 in the Genocide Convention's reference to such an international tribunal.

In addition to these three institutions, there must be fundamental reforms in two existing ones.

1. The U.N. Security Council has too often been unable to act in the face of genocide or crimes against humanity because of the veto or threat of a veto by one of its Permanent Five members. There are two possible ways around this problem, short of amending the U.N. Charter. (Amending the Charter would require the consent of all of the Perm Five, and is therefore unlikely.) The Perm Five could agree in advance, possibly even by formal written treaty, that if a case of genocide is brought before the Security Council, and a majority of the Council determines that genocide has, in fact, occurred or is likely to occur, none of the Perm Five will exercise their right to veto actions by the Council, including dispatch of a peace-keeping force. A second way around the veto is the Uniting for Peace Resolution of 1950, which states that when the Security Council is unable to act because of a veto, a majority of the Council may refer the matter to the U.N. General Assembly, which can then take full action by two-thirds vote. The Uniting for Peace Resolution was used in the Suez crisis in 1956, the Congo in 1960, and most recently regarding the Palestinian situation. Though the U.S. originated it, it has now backed away from it, but historical practice has made the Uniting for Peace Resolution settled international law.

2. Every U.N. member must pay its assessments, both for regular U.N. operations and for peace-keeping operations. The U.S., of course, is the worst scoff-law, I am ashamed to say. The U.N. may have to get tough and take away the U.S. vote in the General Assembly. But eventually a better system than voluntary contributions by national governments needs to be found to finance the United Nations.

These institutional changes will not be enough to end genocide in the twenty-first century. Eventually we must return to the problem of political will. It was not for want of U.N. peace-keepers in Rwanda that 800,000 people died. They died because of the complete lack of political will by the world's leaders to save them. Indeed, it was their political will to actually withdraw the U.N. peace-keepers and leave them to their murderers. Neither the U.S. nor any other member of the U.N. Security Council had the political will to risk one of their citizens to rescue 800,000 Tutsis from genocide.

There is something profoundly wrong about that. What is wrong is the very same problem of ethno-centrism that I spoke about earlier. We drew a national boundary, a circle that shut them out of our common humanity. Last week, the second debate of the candidates for President of the United States demonstrated that neither candidate has learned the lessons of Rwanda. The Washington Post excoriated them both the next day. ([Full text of editorial in Appendix 2.](#)) Governor Bush said we needed early warning, but were right not to send in U.S. troops because Africa is not in the sphere of America's national interests. Vice President Gore tried to excuse the Clinton administration's policy failure by saying we had no allies to go in with, as we did in Bosnia; ignoring the fact that 2800 U.N. peace-keepers were already on the ground. Evidently, he dismissed the use of the U.N. as a multi-lateral peace-keeper.

The time has come to reassert our common humanity. Any time someone says it's not in the "national interest" to stop a genocide, ask about the billions we'll spend for relief of refugees, the hundreds of thousands who will flee to our shores, and more importantly the shame we should feel as human beings to see mass murder before our eyes, but walk by on the other side. When you get a form at immigration or at a job application that asks you your race, what do you write? I simply write, "Human." Because that's the truth. We are all of the same race.

How can we create a consciousness of our common humanity? We must create a world-wide movement to end genocide like the movement to abolish slavery in the nineteenth century. The International Campaign to End Genocide, organized at the Hague Appeal for Peace in May 1999, intends to mobilize the international political will to end genocide. (For a more complete description of the Campaign, see [Appendix 3.](#))

The first job in preventing and stopping genocide is getting the facts in clear, indisputable form to policy makers. Most of that job is done by CNN and the news media. But conveying the information is not enough. It must be interpreted so that policy makers understand that genocidal massacres are systematic; that the portents of genocide are as compelling as warnings of a hurricane. Then options for action must be suggested to those who make policy, and they must be lobbied to take action.

The International Campaign to End Genocide works to create political will through:

1. **Consciousness raising** -- maintaining close contact with key policy makers in governments of U.N. Security Council members, providing them with information about genocidal situations.

2. **Coalition formation** --working in international coalitions to respond to specific genocidal situations and involving members in campaigns to educate the public and political leaders about solutions.

3. **Policy advocacy** -- preparing options papers for action to prevent genocide in specific situations, and presenting them to policy makers.

The International Campaign to End Genocide concentrates on predicting, preventing, stopping, and punishing genocide and other forms of mass murder. It brings an analytical understanding of the genocidal process to specific situations. It aims to create the international institutions and the political will to end genocide forever.

Just as the nineteenth century was the century of the movement to abolish slavery, let us make the twenty-first the century when we end genocide. Genocide, like slavery, is caused by human will. Human will – including our will – can end it. The international campaign to end genocide was truly begun by the man we honor here today, Raphael Lemkin.