



Preventing Genocide Newsletter: 75 Years of the Genocide Convention

*United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility
to Protect*



"The Convention embodied a new global commitment to ensure that “never again” should any person endure the horror of genocide. Sadly, we are in danger of forgetting the dark lessons of the past. In today’s world of deep division, mistrust and conflict, we remain confronted by the enduring menace of this atrocious crime. This year’s [2023] theme reminds us that the Convention and its timeless message must remain a living force in our world, calling us to uphold its solemn promise."

-- António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General

A Living Force in World Society: The enduring legacy of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide amidst growing challenges

Foreword

“On 9 December 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted its first human rights treaty – the [Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide](#) (the “Genocide Convention”) - by unanimous vote affirming that genocide is a crime under international law, whether committed in times of peace or in times of war. In the room that day, as almost every day since the very first discussions on the 1946 Resolution which called upon the development of the Convention, was Polish Jewish lawyer Raphael Lemkin. Lemkin was the person who coined the term “genocide” in 1944 and whose unwavering perseverance led to the very existence of the Convention. Lemkin had hoped that the Convention would become ‘a living force in world society’. To this end, he called on States to “now make this convention a living force in their societies by introducing appropriate domestic legislation which will carry in itself a great educational message of respect, love and compassion for human beings beyond their boundaries, irrespective of religion, nationality and race.”

Since its adoption, the “Genocide Convention” has played a vital role in the development of international criminal law as we know it today. It defined the crime of genocide as the intended destruction, in whole or in part, of a racial, national, ethnic, or religious group. The formal definition of the crime in the Convention has been subsequently included in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court in 1998, as well as in the statutes of other jurisdictions, such as the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda, and the Extraordinary Chambers in Cambodia. It has been ratified or acceded to by 113 States. Unfortunately, 41 United Nations Member States have yet to do so.

The legal force of the Convention is unquestionable. Whether States have ratified the Convention or not, they are bound by the principle that genocide is a crime under international law, and they have an obligation to prevent and punish it.

This remains essential. If we have learned a lesson in the last 75 years since the Convention was adopted, it is that when protection fails, it fails those who need it most. The call for prevention therefore resonates today even more strongly when and where the risk of this crime is high.

With the aim of reiterating the imperative of prevention and accountability, we dedicated the entire year of 2023, in the lead up to 9 December - a date internationally marked as the Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime - to remind the world why the Genocide Convention was created and what its implications are. This came with an urgent call to

all nations to renew their commitment to this important treaty as a 'living force' in our societies. This newsletter provides an overview of activities and advocacy undertaken throughout last year the Office in connection to this commemoration and highlights the everlasting importance of this landmark document in this milestone year.

Back in 1944, Raphael Lemkin developed the concept of genocide inspired by the need to respond to previous instances in which entire nations, and ethnic and religious groups, had been targeted on the basis of their identity. This was a concern which haunted him for years even before the outbreak of World War II. This took on greater significance for him when in the Holocaust, forty-nine members of his family, including his parents, were murdered.

Genocide is a process [for which there are warning signs](#). Throughout 2023, my team and I conducted field missions and issued alerts. We also worked with UN teams and entities in different regions on recognizing and addressing risk factors and warning signs of genocide and related crimes, and increasingly indicative trends of hate speech. We also expanded our policy toolbox in 2023 with the [Guide for Policy Makers and Practitioners on Countering and Addressing Online Hate Speech](#); the [Plan of Action for Women in Communities to Counter Hate Speech and Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Genocide and Related Atrocity Crimes](#) (also called the Napoli Plan of Action); and a joint guide with UNESCO for policy-makers for [Addressing Hate Speech Through Education](#).

Conducting analysis and issuing early warnings only constitute first steps which must be followed by early action. In the same way, ratifying the Convention must be followed by domestication, including through the establishment of national legal and policy frameworks and tools aimed at preventing and punishing genocide.

On the solemn occasion of the International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime, and the 75th Anniversary of the adoption of the Genocide Convention, the moment of silence for victims of genocide echoed loudly as a reminder of all who perished and of all who are still in peril.

Strengthening our resolve to fully implement the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide is something we owe to the victims of past genocides and to future generations. This is an urgent call. Building a world free from genocide and related crimes (war crimes and crimes against humanity) should not be only an aspiration. It must become a reality.

On 9 December 2023, at the International Day commemoration, we also recognized the work of champions, including advocates, survivors, and organizations across the world, leading the way and proving that one person can change entire systems, as Raphael Lemkin did decades ago. I was grateful to present to the world our 2023 Raphael Lemkin Champions of Prevention. You can meet them below and support their efforts to advance the prevention of genocide and related crimes globally. “

Alice Wairimu Nderitu, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide

The Path to the Convention



“Recognizing that at all periods of history genocide has inflicted great losses on humanity, and being convinced that, in order to liberate mankind from such an odious scourge, international co-operation is required, the contracting parties...”, meaning the Member States of the United Nations, agreed on the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the first-ever human rights treaty adopted by the Organization on 9 December 1948.

The much [anticipated moment on that 9 December](#) when the Convention was voted on, came after the horrors of the World War II following years of tireless advocacy by one man – Raphael Lemkin. Even before, in the years between the two world wars, Lemkin contemplated the legal challenges of defining and criminalizing intentional mass murder, and in 1944, in his book “Axis Rule in Occupied Europe,” he finally gave this crime a name: genocide. This word consists of the Greek prefix "genos", meaning race or tribe, and the Latin suffix "cide", meaning killing. Lemkin followed closely the Nuremberg trials for Nazi senior leaders accused of crimes committed during WWII for overall condemnation of Nazi policies prior to the war from which he had escaped to the United States. He came to New York and advocated with Ms. Eleanor Roosevelt, the first Chair of the Human Rights Commission, as well as with the delegations of Cuba, Panama, and India, to sponsor a Resolution on genocide. The first [Resolution passed in 1946](#) introduced, for the first time, genocide as a crime under international law and called for a dedicated Convention on this crime. Raphael Lemkin was then called upon to be in the expert team supporting the UN Secretariat in this endeavor. “The General Assembly had in mind a Convention which would enable genocide to be punished in whatever circumstances it was committed”, [the Secretariat noted in its report](#). “It did this because it wished to give special treatment to the crime of genocide because of the gravity of that crime, which aims at systematic extermination of human groups”.

[The Convention](#) finally came into being in 1948. It included a definition of the crime of genocide in its Article II as “any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: Killing members of the group; Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”

This definition was the result of a negotiating process and reflects the compromise reached among United Nations Member States at the time of drafting. This same definition has been subsequently included in the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (Article 6), as well as in the statutes of other international and hybrid jurisdictions, such as the International Criminal Tribunal for the

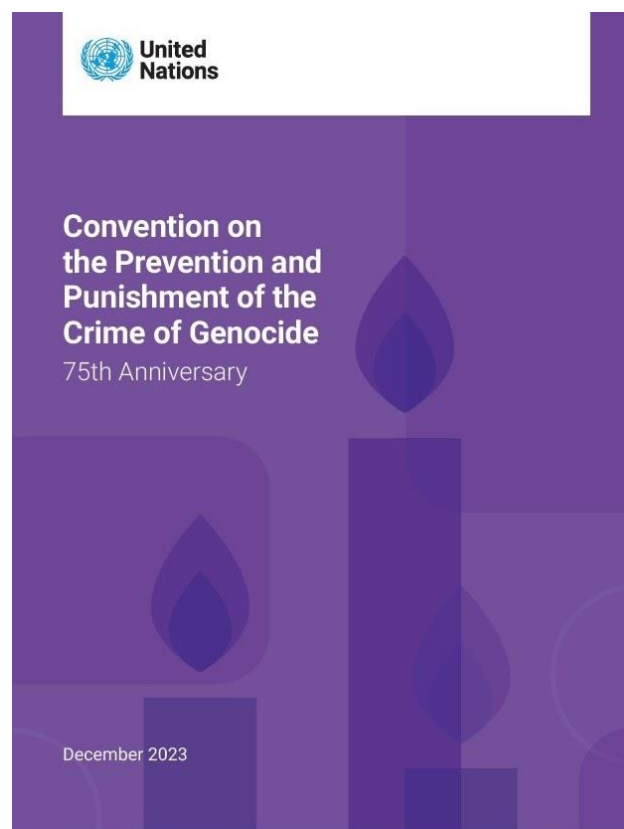
former Yugoslavia, and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and the Extraordinary Chambers in Cambodia. While many States have also criminalized genocide in their domestic legislation others have yet to do so.

After the adoption of the Convention, Raphael Lemkin dedicated the rest of his life to promote and encourage ratification by Member States. He passed away in 1959. The story of his life, part of which you can [hear recounted here](#), remains forever intertwined with the creation of the word genocide, in conceptualization, drafting and ratification of the Genocide Convention and the Resolution that came before it, and with efforts to prevent and punish the crime of genocide. We are all indebted to him for his work and must continue preserving his legacy.

To date, the Genocide Convention has been ratified or acceded to by 153 States. Forty-one United Nations Member States have yet to do so.

Key Documents

click on the ribbon under each of the documents to expand the text



1 - CONVENTION ON THE PREVENTION AND PUNISHMENT OF THE CRIME OF GENOCIDE

The Genocide Convention was the first human rights treaty adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 9 December 1948. It codified for the first time the crime of genocide and signified the international community's commitment to 'never again' after the atrocities committed during the Second World War. Its adoption marked a crucial step towards the development of international human rights and international criminal law as we know it today. [Find it here.](#)



THE CONVENTION ON THE PREVENTION AND PUNISHMENT OF THE CRIME OF GENOCIDE (1948)

ABOUT THE GENOCIDE CONVENTION

What is the Genocide Convention?

The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Genocide Convention) is an instrument of international law that codified for the first time the crime of genocide. Its preamble recognizes that "at all periods of history genocide has inflicted great losses on humanity" and that international cooperation is required to "liberate humankind from such an odious scourge".

DATE OF ADOPTION: 9 December 1948

DATE OF ENTRY INTO FORCE: 12 January 1951

NUMBER OF STATES PARTY: 153 States¹

According to the Convention, genocide is a crime that can take place both in time of war as well as in time of peace. The definition contained in Article II of the Convention describes genocide as a crime committed with the intent to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, in whole or in part. It does not include political groups or so called "cultural genocide". This definition was the result of a negotiating process and reflects the compromise reached among United Nations Member States while drafting the Convention in 1948.

Importantly, the Convention establishes a duty on State Parties to take measures to prevent and to punish the crime of genocide, including by enacting relevant legislation and punishing perpetrators, "whether they are constitutionally responsible rulers, public officials or private individuals" (Article IV).

Why is the Genocide Convention important?

Challenged by the fact that there is a name for the crime of killing one person—murder—and none to describe the killing of a million people, Polish lawyer Raphael Lemkin coined the word 'genocide' in 1944. Lemkin combined the prefix geno, from the Greek word for race or tribe, with the suffix -cide, derived from the Latin word for killing. Lemkin contributed greatly in the drafting of the Genocide Convention expressing the hope that it would become 'a living force in world society'.

¹ As of April 2022



United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect
un.org/genocideprevention

2 - WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT THE GENOCIDE CONVENTION: FACTSHEET

The Factsheet provides key points on the Genocide Convention, its use and the status of ratification. Find it in [English](#), [French](#) and [Spanish](#).

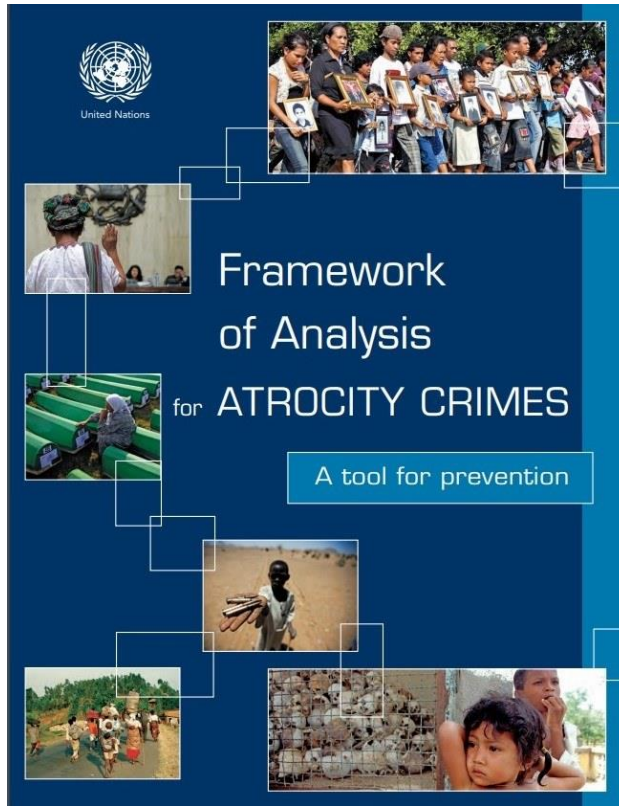


**WHEN TO REFER TO A
SITUATION AS "GENOCIDE":**
A brief guidance note

United Nations Office on Genocide
Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect

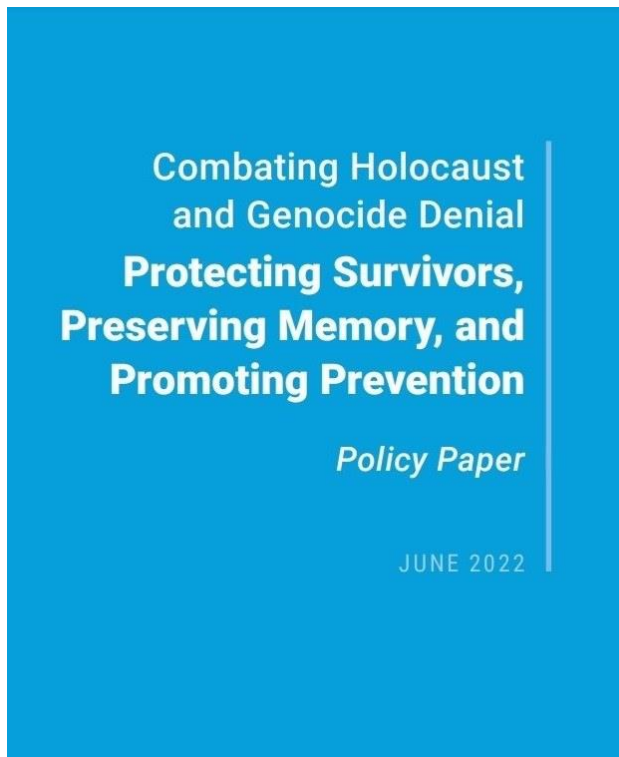
3 - WHEN TO REFER TO A SITUATION AS GENOCIDE: GUIDANCE NOTE

The question is often asked as to whether specific events, past or present, can be referred to as "genocide." It is important to adhere to the correct usage of the term, for several reasons. [Read the Guidance Note here.](#)



4 - FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS FOR ATROCITY CRIMES

The Framework is the main analytical and early warning tool of prevention developed by the Office in 2014. It lines up common and specific risk factors for atrocity crimes. Find it in [English](#), [French](#) and [Spanish](#).



5 - COMBATING HOLOCAUST AND GENOCIDE DENIAL: POLICY PAPER

Hate speech has been known to stigmatize, marginalize, enable discrimination as well as incite hate crimes and large-scale violence. Genocide and Holocaust denial is often tied to hate speech, specifically when the aim is to target individuals or groups based on specific identity factors. The Policy Paper, focused on Protecting Survivors, Preserving Memory, and Promoting Prevention, outlines sets of recommendations for all key stakeholders. [Read it here.](#)

The official Commemoration of 75 Years of the Genocide Convention



6 - Official Commemoration of 9 December at UN HQ

The 9 December 2023 High-level Expert Commemoration and Discussion

The 2023 high-level commemoration of 9 December/ International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime at the United Nations Headquarters was held under the theme **“A Living Force in World Society: The Legacy of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide”**. The activities on December 9th were headlined by ten distinguished and highly eminent experts on the prevention of genocide, and served as a culmination of sustained advocacy and a series of expert discussions which unpacked the legacy of the 75 years of the Genocide Convention. The experts presented a summary of the discussions held on the themes of prevention, punishment and memory.

The solemn commemoration started with a minute of silence honoring victims of genocide across the world. Three dedicated panels reflected on the impact of the Convention in the areas of accountability, prevention, and memory – while looking ahead at steps needed to strengthen its ratification and universal and unequivocal implementation.

In a dedicated message, **United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres** warned that “.....in today’s world of deep division, mistrust and conflict, we remain confronted by the enduring menace of this atrocious crime [of genocide]; in danger of forgetting the dark lessons of the past”. In his address, **H.E. Dennis Francis, the President of the General Assembly**, said “We must accept that the imperative to prevent genocide is both a legal and moral obligation”.

The **Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Wairimu Nderitu** highlighted the important achievements of the Genocide Convention, including its critical contribution in shaping the international

criminal law framework we have today. However: “Across the world genocide remains a real risk for populations...it requires all of us to take the steps needed to make the Genocide Convention a reality – to make it a living force in society, the way Raphael Lemkin hoped it would be”. Whether or not Member States have ratified the Convention, they are bound by the principle that genocide is a crime under international law, and they have an obligation to prevent and punish it.

The event comprised three panel discussions. The first panel, focused on accountability, included remarks by **Ms. Silvia Fernandez de Gurmendi, President of the Assembly of States for the Rome Statute; Mr. Karim A. A. Khan, Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court; Mr. Serge Brammertz, Prosecutor of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals; and Mr. Christoph Safferling, Director of the International Nuremberg Principles Academy**. Panelists underlined that, while progress has been made in the use of the Convention in legal proceedings, gaps persist. It is only through concerted efforts and collective commitment that the protection of individuals can be prioritized and accountability for perpetrators ensured.

“There is much to celebrate since the adoption of the Genocide Convention in the quest for accountability for the greatest international crimes. however, despite the nature of the prohibition to commit genocide and the general recognition of the need to prevent and suppress this crime, neither the Genocide Convention nor the Rome statute have attained universal participation. This lack of universality creates gaps where impunity regrettably continues to flourish, leaving victims without protection and without remedy for the harm suffered. As we commemorate the 75th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention and the 25th anniversary of the Rome statute, the challenge of enforcing the prohibition against genocide and - more globally - mass atrocity crimes, remains enormous. “

Ms. Silvia Fernandez de Gurmendi, President of the Assembly of States for the Rome Statute



7 - Ms. Silvia Fernandez de Gurmendi

“In this divided world we clearly need these United Nations, we need to come together and realize that beyond the jurisprudence that is emerged in different courts and tribunals, there is a very simple imperative that must be given life to...[in this room] we must remember those that are terrified and scared, being hunted down, targeted because of their race or their religion; for any of the reasons prescribed in the Genocide convention. They look to the powerful, they look to the society, States, organizations, for more effective protection. Because, ultimately what was this 1948 Convention but a promise. It was a collective promise to children, to women, to men, to people around the world, to future generations that the unspeakable experience of the Shoa should not be repeated. That gave rise to the

cry, to the prayer, to the hope, the demand of “never again” and it was the undertaking from the leaders of the world that the measures would be put in place. (...) This is still a work in process. “

Mr. Karim A. A. Khan, Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court



8 - Mr. Karim A. A. Khan

“Our obligations under the Genocide Convention to punish the perpetrators have no expiration date. Just as trials for crimes during the Holocaust continue today, so too will prosecutions for crimes in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia need to continue for many years to come. And for genocide crimes committed now, even if punishment may seem distant, we must maintain our commitment and honor our obligations, if not today then tomorrow. Second, we as the international community share those obligations in common. No one country alone can be expected to shoulder the burden to bring justice to the victims and survivors of genocide. That means that effective multilateral cooperation is essential to achieve accountability for crimes past, present and future. We must also recognize that denial is the final act of genocide. Denial erases both the victims and the crimes. So as much as we must continue to seek out and punish the perpetrators, it also falls to us to ensure that the truth is defended and promoted. This is our ultimate responsibility under the Genocide Convention, if we are to truly prevent and repress the crime of crimes.”

Mr. Serge Brammertz, Prosecutor of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals



9 - Mr. Serge Brammertz

“Raphael Lemkin actually found something genuinely new as the injustice that underlines this crime. It is not like any other criminal norm that protects the individual's life and integrity. It is a group that is being protected. A group. So, genocide as such is a generic international norm because it is about the protection of minorities, groups that have been defined by ethnicity, nationality, race, by religion...At the 75th anniversary, the best present we could have for Raphael Lemkin under the Genocide Convention is to say we do not need you anymore. We abolished genocide. But we haven't achieved that, have we? So, the promise that has been laid down in the Genocide Convention by the international community, this is what we have to fulfill, we have to work towards, with all our means, to prevent genocide and to make the Genocide Convention a living force in the social life and thus safe humanity.”

Mr. Christoph Safferling, Director of the International Nuremberg Principles Academy



10 - Mr. Christoph Safferling

The second panel was centered on reflections on keeping the memory alive, as discussed by **Mr. Emir Suljagić, Director of Srebrenica Memorial Center, and Mr. Honore Gatera, Director of Kigali Genocide Memorial**. These panelists underscored that, despite ongoing challenges and beyond legal frameworks, the Convention has ensured that atrocity crimes do not occur in silence, and that survivors can amplify their voice with it: both to seek justice and to preserve the facts that are determined with judgements. In some cases, like Rwanda, the spirit of the Convention was adjudicated in the work of traditional courts.



"75 years after the adoption of the Genocide Convention, I like many other people who have been in my shoes, have asked myself what it is that it had contributed to. Yes, there have been some successes in terms of implementation and these successes are measured in the number of international tribunals and international justice mechanisms in place, but what did it bring beyond that? And I thought through that when the Convention was being negotiated, there was no place for people like me or for a lot of people at the table, but those who were allowed to the table, those who survived Holocaust, managed to leave us with something. What they have left us with is that no one who ever faced similar atrocities would be sitting in silence again. There are no more genocides taking place in silence, at the very least, and maybe that was the most that that generation could achieve. Maybe it is time to see what this generation, our generation, can actually achieve further. "

Mr. Emir Suljagić, Director of Srebrenica Memorial Center



12 - Mr. Emir Suljagic

"Memorialization, memorial sites, and many other efforts that work toward remembering the victims by their faces and their names are playing a very big role even in the punishment and prevention of the crime of genocide. Because the activities that memorials and these sites do are feeding information that can be important in allowing justice to follow the criminals who have found many strategies of fleeing from justice. More so, for us, these efforts are to ensure that those who are younger than us now, in the future, never face what we faced. What I've seen is enough, and I do not wish any young boy to walk into my footsteps and in the end become someone who is dedicating his career to preventing genocide, to prevent this saddest event that has ever happened in his life."

Mr. Honore Gatera, Director of Kigali Genocide Memorial



13 - Mr. Honore Gatera

The third panel focused on prevention and included remarks by **Ms. Graciela Gatti Santana, President of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals; Ms. Felice Gaer, Director of the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights; Mr. James Waller, Director of the Dodd Human Rights Impact Programs, University of Connecticut; Ms. Farina So, Principal Deputy Director of the Documentation Center of Cambodia; and Mr. David Simon, Director of the Genocide Studies Program at Yale University.** Interventions at this panel focused on the importance of accountability and justice beyond the courtrooms, including their role as deterrent of future crimes and as foundation for memorialization of what occurred in the past and for countering denial. The role of education was particularly highlighted as essential to prevention.

“Persevering and continuing to fight for justice and accountability is one effective way to achieve prevention. What is important is that the international community consistently and timely takes measures to bring to justice those suspected of genocide or other international crimes. Judicial processes however are not the only way in which International Criminal Tribunals can and do contribute to the prevention of genocide - tribunals adjudicating cases of genocide must be prepared to go beyond the judicial work and ensure that the judicial findings reach the affected communities in a way that is understandable and primarily by a non-legal audience...Today we see an increase in phenomena such as genocide denial, historical revisionism and glorification of convicted criminals. In this, helping the public, particularly the younger generations understand the human suffering behind the legal findings, can play a significant role in prevention. In this respect education has an enormous value for setting a strong foundation for societies that are resilient, inclusive and compassionate.”

Ms. Graciela Gatti Santana, President of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals



14 - Ms. Graciela Gatti Santana

“Holocaust and genocide denial are forms of harmful denigration that traumatized survivors and their communities. They convey pernicious stereotypes about and encourage and perpetrate hatred, including antisemitism anti-Muslim bigotry and other types of hatred of groups that have faced genocidal violence in the past; they undermine historical memory about tragic events that have been conclusively established and this denial encourages audiences to ascribe to other conspiracies and disinformation... There are many signs of social fragility around the world today yet in our view, it is ignorance of past, of the history of past genocides, including the Holocaust, and ignorance of the patterns of discrimination and demonization that proceeded them that have a particularly pernicious impact particularly as the very idea of historical truth is also being challenged today to an unprecedented extent. In this context, our call for prevention is not only an appeal for early action. It is a plea to avoid the repetition of the darkest chapters of human history.”

Ms. Felice Gaer, Director of the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights



15 - Ms. Felice Gaer

“In our global work, we still are fighting against perception that genocide prevention always means military intervention, that simply putting boots on the ground, responding to force with greater force is what we mean by genocide prevention. In my mind that’s a failure of our moral imagination if that’s the limited scope in which we think about genocide prevention. We talk about prevention much more broadly, think of upstream, midstream and downstream prevention with upstream prevention being all of the measures we take to build resilience in societies which could be at risk for genocide - and every

society in the world has some degree of risk for genocide. Think how we build strong democratic institutions, foster social cohesion, teach conflict history appropriately... All of that is the important work of upstream prevention, which is the most important prevention work we can do because it is the most efficient and the most lifesaving. The more we can help people comprehend that broad understanding of genocide prevention, the better our work will be."

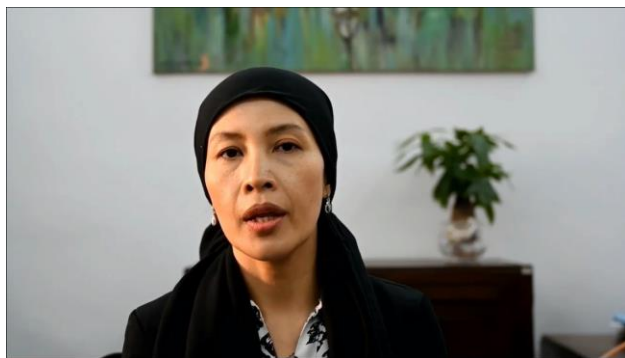
Mr. James Waller, Director of the Dodd Human Rights Impact Programs, University of Connecticut



16 - Mr. James Waller

"Questioning the past is crucial; in fact, it is paramount. But studying the past must be part of a demonstrated commitment to the present and future. Atrocity crimes education in all its forms, including formal and informal education, is atrocity crimes prevention. Education is the single most efficient and effective way of preventing the conditions and catalysts to atrocity crimes in the future. Successful education requires hard work by governments as much as civil society. In addition, education requires resources and a demonstrated commitment that exceeds what mankind has historically given to response, prosecution, and punishment of these crimes."

Ms. Farina So, Principal Deputy Director of the Documentation Center of Cambodia



"As Lemkin acknowledged in a lecture to his Yale law students, the Convention was meant not to concern itself with details—it offered no guarantees of fairness, retribution, restoration, or even a more liberal world. All of this, he envisioned, would come if and only if the international community allowed the law to grow and evolve alongside international norms and emerging frontiers of genocide...It is clear that any hope of eradicating genocide and thereby realizing Lemkin’s legacy requires not just an appreciation of the text of the Convention that we celebrate today but also the leadership and the commitment to animate it. My students and their peers around the world will experience much more of the next 75 years of the Genocide Convention than they have of the past 3/4 of a century. For them, I humbly but urgently ask the international community represented here and elsewhere to embrace the new conscience that Lemkin dreamed of during his time at Yale. "

Mr. David Simon, Director of the Genocide Studies Program at Yale University



18 - Mr. David Simon

The event also honored the work of the 2023 Raphael Lemkin Champions of Prevention (more below) and unveiled a special artistic interpretation of the theme of the commemoration - a living force in world society- provided through the courtesy of the Italian artist Arrigo Musti. Titled “Law of Conservation of Life”, the artwork depicts a pendulum calling everyone to action in upholding the principles of the Convention. [Read more here](#). **Watch the [entire commemoration here](#).**



19 - "Law of Conservation of Life" by the Italian artist Arrigo Musti, pictured with the Special Adviser Nderitu and the Permanent Representative of Italy, H.E. Maurizio Massari

Dedicated video-messages commemorating 75 years of the Genocide Convention were also shared on occasion, and further distributed on social media.



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20 - Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

"The Genocide Convention is the first human rights treaty in the history of the United Nations, adopted on the eve of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Seventy-five years later, the two foundational agreements remain closely interlinked. The Convention calls on all States, and all of us, to maintain vigilance, and push for action to prevent genocide, everywhere. In reality, genocide is never unleashed without warning. It is always the culmination of serious human rights violations: identifiable patterns of systematic discrimination – based on race, ethnicity, religion or other characteristics – which have been ignored. The prohibition of genocide is not an ordinary rule of international law: it is jus cogens – an overriding fundamental principle, at all times and without exception, for all humanity. "

Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights



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21 - Nicholas Koumjian, Head of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar

"The only international law that protects the existence of groups, the Convention protects national, racial, religious and ethnic groups from destruction...The crime is a recognition that all of humanity suffers when we lose one of these elements of the beautiful kaleidoscope that is the diversity of humanity."

Nicholas Koumjian, Head of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar



<https://sway.cloud.microsoft/SldfEmCaMEhLTQy#content=JYyLwikZBGyh31>

22 - Rudelmar Bueno de Faria, General Secretary of ACT Alliance

"Let's not forget - the Convention is not a static entity; it is a living document. It requires constant vigilance and efforts from the international community. We have seen the horrors of failing to act, and the consequences have been devastating. Civil society as watchdog plays a vital role in safeguarding these commitments (of the Convention). "

Rudelmar Bueno de Faria, General Secretary of ACT Alliance

Briefing the Human Rights Council on Genocide Convention, with focus on Digital Spaces

In the lead up to 9 December 2023, an intersessional meeting was convened by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in accordance with Human Rights Council Resolution 49/9 on the prevention of genocide and marking the 75th anniversary of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The meeting, held in Geneva on 4 December, focused on the role of social media platforms and on the risk of their instrumentalization by those seeking to spread hate leading to real-world discrimination and violence.

The meeting included contributions by Member States, the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, representatives of treaty bodies, Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council and regional human rights mechanisms, civil society, national human rights institutions, experts from academia, and other stakeholders in open-space discussion over three dedicated panels.



23 - Special Adviser Nderitu at the Human Rights Council, December 2023

Opening the meeting, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, reminded that “genocide is often preceded or accompanied by statements from political leaders and other public figures that dehumanize and demonize people from targeted communities. Disinformation campaigns on social media can further amplify these statements, until condoning and justifying violence becomes normalized. The knowledge that the international community is monitoring statements and events, and that justice will come, has a deterrent impact on perpetrators.”

In her opening remarks, and welcoming the engagement of the Human Rights Council, the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Wairimu Nderitu, highlighted “the number of situations across the world where communities are at risk of genocide and related atrocity crimes remains of concern – many of which I highlighted in my interactive dialogue with this Council last July. The situations across the world in which hate speech and incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence are being spread and instrumentalized continue to be alarming.” [Read more here](#). And [watch the session here](#).

Side-events with Partners Bring Attention to the Many Sides of Upholding Genocide Convention

Ahead of the main commemorative event at the United Nations Headquarters, the Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, together with other United Nations, State, and civil society partners, hosted a number of events aimed at highlighting different aspects of the Convention and the work that led to its adoption. This included a side-event with religious leaders and actors co-hosted with the UN Alliance of Civilizations on 28 November 2023, on upholding values and principles of the 1948 Genocide Convention. Religious leaders and actors across all faiths are key partners in advancing the United Nations’ principles, values, and work of the United Nations. More specific to the prevention of genocide and other atrocity crimes, religious leaders and actors have a pivotal role in fostering peaceful, inclusive, and just societies. In this context, since 1948, scores of religious leaders and actors have been tirelessly championing the Genocide Convention, advocating for its ratification, domestication, and full implementation. Their role in coming together in the face of concerns for rising risk factors for genocide and related crimes across the world resonated in the discussion, which [can be watched here](#).



24 - Ms. Debra Boudreaux, Chief Executive Officer of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, at the December 6, 2023 event.

On 6 December 2023, an event titled “An afternoon with Raphael Lemkin” was organized by the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights, bringing to light the key role of Lemkin in defining and codifying genocide and including reflections from the Permanent Missions of Rwanda and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The day after, on 7 December, the Permanent Missions of Germany, Bosnia and

Herzegovina, Cambodia, Israel, Poland, and Rwanda, together with the Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, co-organized a side-event aimed at reflecting on the 75 years of the Convention, offering Member States perspective and experiences.

Presenting the 2023 Raphael Lemkin Champions of Prevention



At the United Nations Headquarters high-level event for the International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime, which took place on 8 December, the Office Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide brought to light the important work being done across the world by individuals and organizations promoting the values and principles of the Genocide Convention and proactively preventing genocide or working to advance accountability, very often in the face of adversity and sometimes danger. According to international law, the obligation to prevent genocide falls primarily on States. However, the work of civil society, including the Champions recognized at this event, remains essential to advance prevention globally.

The recipients were unveiled as the 2023 Raphael Lemkin Champions of Prevention. They are men, women and youth, members of civil society organizations, as well as survivors of past genocides or other international crimes, who believe, like Raphael Lemkin did, that as individuals we all have a role to play in building a world free from genocidal and related violence. They serve as role models. Their work honors the victims of this egregious crime and inspires future action. The 2023 Champions come from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Cambodia, Iraq, Rwanda, Sudan, United States of America and

Cambodia, and include a member of a Rohingya women organization and a civil society group working for the protection of the Roma in Europe. [Meet them all here.](#)

2023 Advocacy & Action Overview

The mandate of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide is global. The Office consistently monitors and analyses situations across the world on the basis of risk factors and indicators included in the Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes developed by the Office. Based on the specific mandate and such analysis, the Special Adviser provides advice to the Secretary-General, and through him to the Security Council, and participates in regular internal senior discussions as part of encompassing UN-system efforts aimed at addressing ongoing crises and situations of deteriorating concern in the world. This work is continuous. While the Special Adviser has and will continue to issue early warnings in response to a range of situations of concern, on many situations across the world requiring urgent action the Secretary-General speaks for the entire United Nations, including the Special Adviser. It is important to underline that genocide is strictly defined in international law; any legal determination on whether there is or not a situation of genocide must be done by appropriate judicial bodies - not by the Secretary-General, or by the Special Adviser.

Briefing the ECOSOC Special session on Social and economic measures to prevent genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity



The Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide briefed a special session of the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on addressing socio-economic structural

factors that if not addressed, could enhance risk of genocide and related crimes (war crimes and crimes against humanity) on 24 January 2023. The special session aimed at identifying preventive measures connected to the work and activities of a range of inter-governmental bodies, including ECOSOC, General Assembly, Security Council, Human Rights Council, and Peacebuilding Commission, taking into consideration the Secretary-General's emphasis on prevention as reflected in Our Common Agenda and with a view to promoting integrated approaches. This session provided an overview of good practices and existing tools – [watch the session here](#).

Visit to Auschwitz – Birkenau Memorial and Museum



<https://sway.cloud.microsoft/SdldfEmCaMEhLTQy#content=tRa1neeDXcagd/>

Visiting the Auschwitz- Birkenau Memorial and Museum in March of 2023, the Special Adviser highlighted the importance of understanding the process of genocidal violence, which starts with dehumanization and hate speech and ends with the commission of genocide and related crimes. She also emphasized the importance of recognizing the risk factors and indicators of such crimes and of reacting in time. The Special Adviser also reiterated the need for preserving Auschwitz- Birkenau as a testimony of the terrible crimes that were committed there. During her visit, the Special Adviser also delivered the keynote speech at the Raphael Lemkin Seminar organized by the [Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities](#).

Commemorating International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination



In a dedicated video message marking the International Day which falls on 21 March, the Special Adviser underlined that "combatting racial discrimination and discrimination on other grounds such as religion and ethnicity is part and parcel of genocide prevention. Unless we do so, 'Never Again' will remain an unfulfilled aspiration. We know that while non-discrimination and equality - a core basis of ending racism - have been a fundamental human right for 75 years, the reality has been much more uneven."

‘Moving on whilst looking back’: commemorating International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda



Open Session of the African Union's Peace and Security Council, 6 April 2023

Ahead of 7 April, the day in which the world commemorates the [International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda](#), the Special Adviser [gave a dedicated interview for UN Today](#) **‘Moving on whilst looking back’**, reflecting on her mandate and daily work of her Office as directly dedicated to the task of genocide prevention. The Special Adviser joined the Kwibuka29 commemorative walk in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and [delivered opening remarks](#) at the African Union's Peace and Security Council Open Session on Prevention of the Ideology of Hate, Genocide and Hate Crimes in Africa. Back at United Nations Headquarters in New York, the Special Adviser opened the "Stories of Survival and Remembrance – A Call to Action for Genocide Prevention" exhibition on 11 April, organized together

with the UN Department of Global Communications. The exhibition, featuring reflections by survivors of four atrocity crimes situations — the Holocaust; the genocide, crimes against humanity and grave breaches of the Geneva conventions for the large scale violations that occurred during the 1975-79 period in Cambodia; the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, and the 1995 genocide in Srebrenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina, is [now available online here](#).

First high-level visit to Brazil - Brasilia, Roraima, Mato Grosso do Sul and Rio De Janeiro



Special Adviser Nderitu meeting with Brazil's first-ever Minister of Indigenous Peoples, Ms. Sonia Guajajara

The Special Adviser [visited Brazil](#) from 1st to 12th May 2023, and held consultations with senior government officials, colleagues at the United Nations Country Team, civil society representatives, community leaders and other relevant actors, on enhancing the protection of vulnerable populations in the country. This includes indigenous peoples, Brazilians of African descent and other groups at risk. The visit was initiated with consultations in Brasilia, immediately followed with meetings in Roraima State with government and state officials and with representatives of indigenous peoples and civil society. The Special Adviser visited the Indigenous Health Center in Boa Vista (CASAI) and witnessed, first-hand, the very precarious situation of the Yanomami people, who have been suffering abuses and violations. She held meetings with leaders from this community and visited other indigenous people and communities in Roraima.

In the State of Mato Grosso do Sul, the Special Adviser held meetings with state officials and civil society; visited the Guarani Kaiowa community in Guapo'y territory as well as other parts of the state and had an exchange with academics at the University of Dourados. The Special Adviser also visited indigenous displaced populations of Guarani Kaiowa and a Quilombo in the state.

The Special Adviser concluded the visit with meetings in Rio Janeiro, including consultations with representatives of the Afro descendant communities that have faced serious acts of violence, as well as with Government officials and representatives of civil society representing and promoting the rights of vulnerable groups. [Full readout here.](#)

Commemorating the 28th Anniversary of Srebrenica Genocide



Representatives of the Mothers of Srebrenica and Zepa, and Victims and Witnesses of Genocide Associations visiting UN HQ in June 2023

In a [dedicated message](#) for the Srebrenica Collective Memory Conference organized by the Srebrenica Memorial Center and the World Jewish Congress, the day before the 11th July commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide and the burial of the newly identified victims, the Special Adviser warned that some forms of hate speech denying past genocide, including the Srebrenica genocide may constitute incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence and may also incite future genocides. The Special Adviser urged all relevant stakeholders to multiply efforts to counter it. [Watch it here.](#) This message was reiterated [on social media](#) as well, whilst the [UN shared a dedicated story](#) with the Mothers of Srebrenica, who reminded the world, in their own words, of what happened to them and their loved ones. [Watch the full video here.](#)

The Pursuit of Justice: 9th Commemoration of the Yazidi Genocide



“We must not forget that thousands of Yazidi women and girls are still missing, following their reported abductions by Daesh, while others have been languishing in displacement camps in Iraq and Syria”, the Special Adviser urged in a [dedicated message](#) for an event marking the 9th commemoration of the Yazidi Genocide, held in Iraq on 3 August. “My visit to Iraq in May 2022 gave me the opportunity to discuss ongoing challenges around accountability and prevention with a range of interlocutors. Regrettably, the Yazidi and other minority communities continue to face structural discrimination, hate speech, and a weak legal framework to address these issues, and to be at risk of atrocity crimes,” the Special Adviser highlighted.

Discussions at the biannual meeting of Genocide Scholars & Universities



The biannual meeting of the International Association for Genocide Scholars (IAGS) held in Barcelona in July, focused on the topic of ‘Authoritarianism & Genocide Narratives of Exclusion’ and fostered discussions on the living relevance of the Genocide Convention and on the imperative of prevention. In her keynote, Special Adviser Nderitu explained the links between hate speech as a driver of narratives of exclusion, and the commission of the crime of genocide. Education remains key for effective prevention, the week-long conference underlined. [Read the Special Adviser’s keynote here.](#)

The Special Adviser also visited [Yale](#) and [Columbia](#) universities in October 2023, engaging with students and professors of genocide studies on her mandate, on the 75th Anniversary of the Genocide Convention and on the importance of countering genocide and Holocaust denial.

On the Precipice: Ensuring collective action for human rights and justice in Sudan



This high-Level event, organized on 21 September on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly high-level week, featured a panel moderated by Amal Clooney and including Special Adviser Nderitu, the ICC Prosecutor Karim A.A. Khan, the Designated Expert of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Sudan, Radhouane Nouicer, and the Founder of Darfur Women Action Group, Ms. Niemat Ahmadi. The event was co-organized by the Permanent Missions of the United Kingdom, United States, Norway, Canada, and Gambia to the UN and the Office of the Prosecutor at the International Criminal Court. Watch the full discussion with the QA session above.

The Nuremberg Forum 2023



Expert panel at the historic Courtroom 600, Nuremberg Palace of Justice

The Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and the International Nuremberg Principles Academy co-hosted the Nuremberg International Forum 2023 on the topic "Legally Undeniable: Criminalizing Genocide Denial". The conference took place from 19 - 21 October 2023 and included opening and panel remarks by Special Adviser Nderitu. The event was held at the historic Courtroom 600 of the Nuremberg Palace of Justice. [Find out more details here.](#)

The Nuremberg International Forum 2023 addressed the timely topic of genocide denial, by exploring it as a concept and in the context in which it is occurring. Expert panel discussions paid special attention to how denial manifests itself and to options to address and counter it, including prevention and accountability when it reaches the threshold of incitement. Participants and experts reflected on the experience of denial of the Holocaust, the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda and the 1995 Srebrenica genocide and shared their informed views on efficacy of multilateral and national efforts to address this phenomenon, including relevant jurisprudence of international criminal tribunals.

Visiting Refugees from West Darfur in Farchana and Adré/ Chad



In her visit to refugee camps in Chad in October 2023, including interactions with refugees from West Darfur in the Farchana and Adré camps, the Special Adviser reiterated her grave concerns about the ongoing violence in Sudan and the continuation of targeted attacks against members of the ethnic Masalit community by the RSF and their allied militias, allegedly perpetrated with an explicit intent to destroy this community. In her (to date) seven statements on the situation in this country since September 2022 (see the link for all statements below) the Special Adviser has reiterated her strong condemnation of the appalling reports of grave human rights violations and abuses that continue being committed in the region and in the country, including identity-based killings often preceded by dehumanization and hate speech, rape and other forms of sexual violence, torture, enforced disappearances, mass arrests and detention, bombings of civilian homes and medical infrastructures and lootings. A number of these attacks, if confirmed, may constitute acts of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Highlighting the Role of Traditional Leaders in Countering and Addressing Hate Speech and Preventing Genocide and Related Crimes and their Incitement through Peace Mediation, in Muscat, Oman



25 - Consultation meeting in Muscat, Oman, November 2023

The Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide partnered with the Sultanate of Oman and the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers to organize in Muscat, Oman, from the 14-15 of November 2023, the second consultation with traditional leaders to finalize the Plan of Action for Traditional Leaders and Actors to counter hate speech and foster peaceful, inclusive, and just societies. The consultation was attended by traditional leaders from across the world who provided inputs to the draft Plan of Action for Traditional Leaders and Actors in Countering and Addressing Hate Speech and Preventing Genocide and Related Crimes (War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity) and their Incitement through Peace Mediation. The Plan of Action will be launched in New York in the second quarter of 2024.

Reading Up: Relevant 2023 Statements by the UN Special Adviser

The complete list of statements issued by the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide can be [accessed here](#).

A Look at the Full Year in Review

For a complete list of activities, take a look at the 2023 Newsletters issued by the Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide:

- **June 2023 Newsletter** [accessed here](#), focused on our actions in the first official year leading the implementation of the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action to Counter Hate Speech
- **August 2023 Special Edition Newsletter** [accessed here](#), focused on our 60-day Campaign on Countering Hate Speech. Covering everything from the June launch of the Plan of Action for Women in Communities to Counter Hate Speech and Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Genocide and Related Atrocity Crimes (The Napoli Women in Communities Plan of

Action), and the high-level event marking the second International Day for Countering Hate Speech, to highlighting UN activities on countering hate speech across the world – primarily through the implementation of the UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech.

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