

Protection for the People

Innovations in Genocide Prevention

*An Interview With the Executive Director
of the Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation*

Governments shouldn't massacre people, and no one should let them do it. That's the basic thrust of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle that all UN member states signed in 2005. Most of the controversy surrounding R2P is based on a narrow part of a section that deals with when the international community should intervene in the affairs of sovereign nations to stop mass murder.

Some say never, others say sometimes.

The debate overshadows the larger point that nations have a duty to protect the people within their borders. To shed light on the full meaning of R2P, the UN General Assembly began a series of annual discussions on the doctrine's three parts, known as pillars.

Later this year, the General Assembly will take up the second pillar—the international community's responsibility to assist states in fulfilling their responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing.

The dialogue will explore the wide range of instruments that can be used to support at-risk states. Ahead of the meeting, Tibi Galis, executive director of the Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation, gave the Stanley Foundation (TSF) a preview of what kinds of pillar two actions are being taken around the world and what's on the horizon.

TSF: Have we had any pillar two success stories?

Tibi Galis: Take Kenya, for instance. Following Kenya's 2007 election there was a tense standoff, with competing sides both claiming victory. This tension quickly descended into bloody ethnic and intercommunal violence resulting

in the deaths of over 1,000 people and the displacement of another 350,000. However, in the five years leading up to the 2013 presidential election, Kenya—bolstered by the international community's pillar two obligation of providing assistance—made significant progress implementing conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms, resulting in a largely peaceful and legitimate election.

The assistance reinforced domestic efforts while foreign governments also provided funding for international NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] to organize and mobilize Kenyan youth against resorting to violence. This was done mostly through conflict-resolution workshops and the targeted use of social media and mobile-communications technology to promote and spread messages of tolerance. Another noteworthy point in the case of Kenya is the involvement of the International Criminal Court after the 2007 election and the deterrent effect it had on future aggression.

The international community's pillar two assistance was successful in Kenya because of its careful coordination, robust funding, and welcomed reception by the national government.

Of course, successful pillar two implementation occurs outside of Africa as well.



Argentina, for example, is on the forefront of domestic genocide prevention and regional leadership. Established in 2012, the National Mechanism for the Prevention of Genocide developed curricula and procedures for genocide prevention training and established channels for communication among government departments with the aim of processing information and, where appropriate, forwarding it to the competent organs of the United Nations. A number of in-country genocide-prevention training seminars have taken place in Argentina since the launch of their national mechanism.

TSF: What are some of the new ways pillar two is being implemented?

Galis: The most exciting front in the implementation of pillar two involves the creation of regional/subregional networks and national committees devoted to the prevention of mass atrocities. For example, the Latin American Network for Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention, supported by 18 Latin American states, is the world's leading initiative fostering capacity building and policy development toward genocide and mass-atrocity prevention.

The network provides a space for the exchange of best practices for public officials and aims to institutionalize a culture of genocide prevention throughout Latin America. The Auschwitz Institute serves as secretariat of the network, and we support member states by co-organizing training seminars and assisting in the development of national policies on genocide prevention. It's our hope that

the network will serve as an example to be followed in other regions worldwide.

Although only two years old, the Latin American network is already an important success story of pillar two's implementation. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called it an effective "partnership for prevention," while the UN special adviser on the prevention of genocide, Adama Dieng, highlighted how "the motivation and achievements of the Latin American Network are already resonating worldwide."

TSF: Could you explain a little more about the network and its impact?

Galis: The structure of the Latin American network is based on the establishment of national and/or ministerial focal points. They are tasked with the identification of areas within their governmental structures where programs in genocide and mass-atrocity prevention can be implemented; they have been critical in the "localized" approach to genocide-prevention capacity building. Every six months, the focal points meet and engage in an interactive dialogue.

The aim is to see every state in Latin America effectively integrate the domestically developed function of preventing genocide and mass atrocities. What's more, we aim to see all government institutions share a common vocabulary of genocide and mass-atrocity prevention and engage in mutual interactive working relationships for prevention. Only then can we be assured that genocide and mass atrocities will be prevented.