



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing

Reducing the Risk of Mass Atrocities

Wednesday, November 14, 2018

10:00 – 11:30 a.m.

2200 Rayburn House Office Building

Opening Remarks as prepared for delivery

Good morning and welcome to the Commission’s hearing on “Reducing the Risk of Mass Atrocities.” This is the second hearing in a series that aims to identify ways Congress can contribute to preventing large-scale, deliberate attacks against civilian populations.

I extend a special welcome to our distinguished panel of witnesses, some of whom have traveled from New York, Indiana and Wyoming to join us today. We very much appreciate your dedication and look forward to benefitting from your expertise.

We decided to hold these hearings because we were appalled that the international community, of which the United States is a part, was unable to halt the terrible human rights and humanitarian crises in Syria and Burma – in spite of the warning signs, the images of the victims and the stories of the survivors. We knew, we were told -- but in the end we did not act, or the actions we took were not effective.

What more should we have done, what more can we do in the future, to prevent these kinds of mass atrocities?

Everyone agrees that prevention is the goal. How do we get there?

Today we will start by asking how we reduce the risk that atrocities will be committed.

A lot of good work has been done to identify risk factors for mass atrocities. It turns out that many, perhaps most, of those risk factors – the “root causes” of violence – tend to be local in nature. They include institutionalized racial, ethnic and religious discrimination and exclusion.

But these risks don’t always lead to mass atrocities. The relationship between risk factors and mass violence is not automatic. Root causes may be conducive to violence, but they are not sufficient in and of themselves.

Sometimes people figure out ways to manage or overcome these risks in their communities before violence explodes. Or the strategies come out of having already experienced and survived atrocities.

These approaches are the focus of the hearing today: peace-building, education, redesigning institutions, engaging with key actors like the private sector, sanctions to change incentives.

The witnesses will discuss some of these approaches, why they work and how they can be better integrated into American diplomacy and aid programs. I look forward to their recommendations.

I believe the work we will hear about today is critically important to institutionalizing an “atrocities prevention lens” in our foreign policy.

I will now introduce our panel.