

**Statement of  
Charles J. Brown  
Chair, Experts Committee on Preventing Mass Violence**

**Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission  
U.S. House of Representatives**

**Hearing on Mass Atrocities Prevention  
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Chairman McGovern, Chairman Hultgren, and members of the Commission, I would like to thank you and the Commission for inviting me to testify. My name is Charles Brown, and I am the Managing Partner at Strategy for Humanity, which works with mission-driven organizations to leverage their strengths and achieve meaningful results. Today, however, I am here in my capacity as Chair of the Experts Committee on Preventing Mass Violence. Convened by the Prevention and Protection Working Group, we are a bipartisan group of sixteen former government officials, academics, think tank experts, and NGO representatives. Our report, *A Necessary Good*, identifies specific steps the Administration, Congress, and civil society can take to ensure continued U.S. leadership on preventing mass atrocities. With your permission, I ask that both my written testimony and the full report be submitted for the record.

Genocide and mass atrocities continue to put civilian lives at risk and challenge the world's conscience. In Syria, South Sudan, Yemen, Myanmar, Central African Republic and elsewhere, hundreds of thousands of civilians have been murdered, raped, beaten, bombarded, gassed, and forced to flee their homes. As you noted, Mr. Chairman, these atrocities are not the product of "ancient" ethnic or religious hatreds but rather of conscious, strategic decisions by ruling elites and non-state actors to achieve specific ends.

If the human toll were not enough, mass atrocities also have unanticipated over-the-horizon effects that undermine both international stability and American interests. As Syria has demonstrated, atrocities can lead to outcomes that directly threaten U.S. national security, including the growth of violent extremism, the rise of new terrorist groups, severe economic and resource disruptions, regional instability, massive refugee flows, and the fracturing of the international system.

The good news is that it doesn't have to be this way. As the Experts Committee report notes, concerted preventative action can play an important role in averting mass atrocities. Our report includes nearly forty recommendations on how best to accomplish this. Today, however, I will focus on its three central themes: *recommit*, *prevent*, and *implement*.

### **Recommit**

We support the White House's recommitment to atrocity prevention in the National Security Strategy (NSS), which pledges to "hold perpetrators of genocide and mass atrocities

accountable.” We applaud its decision to retain the Atrocities Prevention Board and want to acknowledge the important work that the APB and sub-APB have undertaken to date. Admiral Garry Hall, the NSC Senior Director who serves as Chair of the APB, has met with us to discuss the Administration’s approach, which emphasizes interagency engagement on the most critical atrocity crises. We are encouraged that his efforts are helping to ensure that the APB is playing an important role in relevant Policy Coordination Committee discussions and furthering the goals and objectives laid out in National Security Strategy.

That said we would like to see the White House’s commitment replicated at the agency level. We are particularly concerned about the possibility that Secretary of State Tillerson’s redesign initiative will lead to a downgrading or elimination of the Office of the Undersecretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights, the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, and the Office of Global Criminal Justice – the three components that have coordinated State’s atrocity prevention initiatives. We urge Congress to seek assurances from Secretary Tillerson that he will retain these essential offices and work with the White House to ensure appointment of strong leadership.

We also urge the Administration to work with Congress to secure the resources and personnel necessary to enable it to prevent and respond to mass atrocities. We would like to see the Administration engage with you and other Members focused on these issues, and to regard you as full partners in this effort.

To that end, we are encouraged by current Congressional efforts to institutionalize atrocity prevention across the interagency, including the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act, which supports the work of the APB, mandates relevant training for Foreign Service Officers, institutionalizes the Complex Crises Fund, and requires the Director of National Intelligence to regularly report on atrocity risks. I’d like to thank those Commission members, including both co-chairs, who have signed on as cosponsors. We also would welcome a measure that would make the APB a statutory body without a sunset provision.

We also would like to see more active U.S. leadership on current atrocity crises. Although the United States cannot respond to every crisis it must lead. That is particularly true in the current crisis in Myanmar. We appreciate Secretary Tillerson’s November 22 statement that the events in Rakhine State in Myanmar constitute ethnic cleansing and his pledge of additional humanitarian assistance. Despite these important steps, however, the crisis has only deepened. We call on the Administration to work with its international partners to demand that the Government of Myanmar bring an end to the violence and ensure that the Rohingya can return safely to their homes – and not to camps. We also strongly urge the Administration to work with the international community to ensure that those responsible are held accountable – efforts that would be consistent with the pledge to take such action in the new National Security Strategy.

Time does not permit me to go into greater detail here today, but we also call on the Administration to demonstrate stronger US leadership to in response to the ongoing atrocities – and the dire humanitarian consequences that they produce – in Syria, South Sudan, Yemen, and the Central African Republic.

## **Prevent**

Perhaps the most important message I can convey today is the crucial role played by early prevention, which we believe should be a major policy priority. When the United States focuses on at-risk countries before they tumble into crisis, it plays a critical role in helping fragile societies develop the capabilities to reduce the threat of mass atrocities and genocide. Early prevention, including effective international cooperation on development assistance; increased support to local actors; and a more consistent approach to countering non-state actor-instigated mass violence, should be a major foreign policy priority. But doing so requires funding programs that forestall open-ended crises and encourage state resilience.

When the international community fails to act before the killing starts, the political and financial costs for the international community – and by extension the United States – skyrocket. The Institute for Economics and Peace has estimated that the global cost of conflict in 2016 was \$14.3 trillion. And, as the World Bank has noted, it takes an average of forty years—two generations—for countries to recover from extreme violence. For the United States, the financial cost of failing to take early action are substantial. Since the crises in the Central African Republic and South Sudan began in 2013, the US has spent nearly \$4 billion in humanitarian relief and other forms of assistance.

For that reason, we call on the Administration to reconsider its proposed drastic cuts to the foreign affairs budget, which will have a particularly devastating impact on early prevention initiatives. We very much appreciate that Congress has rejected the Administration’s draft budget and encourage you to support, at a minimum, maintaining foreign affairs funding at 2017 levels.

We also would like to draw your attention to the proposed Global Fragility and Violence Reduction Act of 2018, which soon will be introduced by Representatives Engel, Coe, McCaul, and Adam Smith. Inspired in part by the Experts Committee’s recommendations, the bill draws on lessons learned from some of the USG’s most effective foreign assistance programs, including the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), and the Millennium Challenge Corporation. Its provisions include directing the administration to launch a “Global Initiative to Reduce Fragility and Violence” and providing more tools and funding for early prevention initiatives.

## **Implement**

Finally, we encourage the Administration to implement the range of initiatives in our report that would help coordinate policy and planning within and across agencies; strengthen and expand embassies’ capacity to track, prevent, and respond to potential atrocity crises; bolster intelligence collection; revisit targeted economic sanctions; and foster professional development opportunities.

Members of the Commission, thank you for your leadership on this important issue. I am happy to answer any questions you may have. We look forward to working with you to ensure continued U.S. leadership on preventing mass atrocities.