



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. I would like to join my Co-Chair in welcoming you to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission's hearing on Reducing the Risk of Mass Atrocities.

Mass atrocities are largescale, deliberate attacks against civilians that are systematically perpetrated because of an extremist ideology such as racism, or as a strategic objective by one group against another, like property grabbing. They often include war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing or genocide. Atrocities such as these usually do not occur as a complete surprise or without warning. They come within the context of years of built-up tension, hate-filled rhetoric, violence, and intense planning.

Mass atrocities do not happen by accident or simply as a by-product of war. They are calculated and strategic to create the greatest amount of suffering conceivable. ISIS sought to annihilate Yezidi communities in Iraq through genocide, viewing them as less than human. The Burmese military continues to seek the destruction of Rohingya communities by driving them from their homes, burning their villages and perpetrating unthinkable levels of sexual violence. The ongoing war in Yemen targets the food and medical supplies of civilian populations as a strategy of war, even purposefully attacking hospitals, schools and humanitarian workers. The result is a country on the edge of a man-made famine, a context in which no one suffers worse than children.

So, what can we do? The only good news is that since these atrocities are created by us, by humans, we can prevent them from ever taking place. Multiple agencies and civil society organizations around the world are helping us to better identify the signs indicating that a particular situation could be on the cusp of a mass atrocity, and how we can avoid it. The U.S.

government is also continually exploring ways that we can better prevent these things from happening.

One small way Congress has sought to contribute to the discussion is by introducing H. R. 3851, also known as the War Crimes Rewards Expansion Act. This bill provides awards for aiding in the arrest or conviction of war criminals facing prosecution in national court jurisdictions – including under applicable U.S. law - in addition to international tribunals. Co-Chair McGovern and I cosponsored this bill to create greater incentives to hold individuals accountable for committing atrocities. It passed the House earlier this year, and we are hoping it will pass the Senate in the coming weeks.

Thanks very much to our expert witnesses for taking time out of their important work to testify today. I look forward to hearing more about effective prevention strategies, and about a framework for how we can all better work together to stop this kind of violence from taking place in the world.

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