

GAAMAC event commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Genocide Convention

On 7 December 2023, GAAMAC convened a panel to reflect upon the accomplishments and challenges of implementing the Genocide Convention as an atrocity prevention tool to strengthen national prevention architectures. It gathered Ambassadors and Experts from civil society based in Geneva.

Seventy-five years ago, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Genocide Convention) was adopted unanimously by the UN General Assembly in the aftermath of World War II in the spirit of “never again” witnessing such suffering. December 2023 marks therefore the seventy-fifth anniversary of this international treaty. Since its adoption on 9 December 1948, the Genocide Convention has been ratified or acceded to by 153 States however, 40 United Nations member states have yet to do so. Despite the existence of this landmark treaty and its broad ratification, numerous ongoing crises underscore the continuous relevance of the UN Genocide Convention. On this occasion, GAAMAC decided to convene an event in the Palais des Nations in Geneva, to reflect upon the accomplishments and challenges of implementing the Genocide Convention as an atrocity prevention tool to strengthen national prevention architectures.

After GAAMAC Chair, Ambassador Christian Guillermet-Fernández of Costa Rica opened the event, some introductory remarks were given by Ms. Christine Löw, Minister and Deputy Head of the Peace and Human Rights Division FDFA of Switzerland. Ms. Löw insisted on the fact that despite the numerous endeavours taken until now to prevent genocide, the current situation worldwide shows that we still need to do more and better. She recalled Elie Wiesel’s famous words demanding that “Never again becomes more than a slogan: It’s a prayer, a promise, a vow”.

Following two video messages by Alice Wairimu Nderitu, the United Nations Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide and by Ms. Jamila Mohammed, the Chair of the [GAAMAC Africa Working Group](#), Ambassador Guillermet-Fernández opened the panel discussion. The panel was composed of: Ambassador Lansana Alison Gberie of Sierra Leone, Ambassador Ib Petersen of Denmark, Ambassador Michèle Taylor of the United States of America, Ms. Elisabeth Pramendorfer as Geneva Representative of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (GCRP), Ambassador Abdallah Saleh Possi of the United Republic of Tanzania and Ambassador Federico Villegas of Argentina.

Ambassador Gberie kicked off the discussion by sharing the success story of establishing of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone following the Lome Peace Accord. He also highlighted the important work of the Special Court, set up by the government of Sierra Leone and the United Nations, to prosecute the crimes committed in the country during the 12-year Civil War. The Ambassador of Denmark then emphasized the importance of the obligation for all States to take

measure in order to support the implementation of the Convention, especially by strengthening their national preventive mechanisms. Denmark has, for example, recently updated its criminal code in order to also prosecute crimes against humanity. Ambassador Petersen then continued by explaining that legal frameworks alone are not sufficient, hence why the Danish authorities implemented an action plan to tackle antisemitism, in particular on social media, as well as hate speech. Denmark has also been a very active supporter of the worldwide buildup of the R2P Focal Point Network and Ambassador Peterson has encouraged the state representatives amongst the participants to join this initiative.

The discussion continued with the testimony of Ambassador Taylor, herself being the daughter and granddaughter of Holocaust survivors. She recalled that all forms of hatred can lead to atrocities. Genocide prevention is at the core of national preoccupation and in this vein, the United States of America adopted a national strategy in 2022 to anticipate, prevent and respond to atrocities. To achieve this, they engage with local and civil society organizations, to identify efficiently early signs and support initiatives such as the [Early Warning Project](#).

Ms. Pramendorfer then followed by explaining how her office, The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, understands the focus on atrocity prevention in the Human Rights System. According to the GCRP, recent years have led to a better understanding of the relationship between human rights and mass atrocity crimes, especially regarding the detection of early warning signs and risk factors. However, the gap that remains is turning this knowledge into practice. According to Ms. Pramendorfer, this is mainly due to a lack of consistency and engagement. To her, it is clear that all of those international instruments and mechanisms “have meaning only if we are willing to implement them at any time and everywhere”.

Ambassador Possi then shared some insights of the achievements of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Tanzanian National Committee. He explained that the International Conference was crucial, since it facilitated international and regional cooperation. Regarding the National Committee, Ambassador Possi highlighted the importance of such committees to make risk assessments and provide training to ensure efficient prevention. He also explained how Tanzania managed to overcome the difference and distance between the various religions and numerous local tribes by engaging with all of them, thus creating a peaceful environment and avoiding any form of hatred.

Finally, Ambassador Villegas, wrapped up the discussion by recalling the importance of history when talking about prevention. To him, looking at the past will most likely give us hints on how to act in the future and this panel's discussions have reflected this conviction. The promise of “never again” is a social contract of humanity that has resulted in the development of the Human Rights System and tools such as the one this panel has commemorated. Ambassador Villegas has been an active supporter of GAAMAC since its creation over ten years ago and he stressed how crucial networks such as this one are for successful prevention efforts. The Ambassador of Argentina reminded also the importance of ensuring individual empowerment. Indeed, he recalled that the genocide in Rwanda initially started with incitement through a radio broadcast; and cautioned how much larger the influence of social media is today. It is therefore crucial to ensure that individuals know how to respond to such incitement. He mentioned also that there are often gaps between stakeholders, therefore it is crucial to have a global dialogue between all entities and nations. Ambassador Villegas closed the discussion by highlighting a key point, namely that everyone needs to be respectful of other countries and how they decide to approach their past.