



United Nations  
Office on Genocide Prevention  
and the Responsibility to Protect

2024

# Policy Guidance



**PROMOTING DIALOGUE AND MEDIATION TO  
PREVENT GENOCIDE,  
WAR CRIMES AND CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY**

UNOSAPG

PROMOTING DIALOGUE AND MEDIATION TO PREVENT GENOCIDE,  
WAR CRIMES AND CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

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# Foreword

Dialogue and mediation can significantly contribute to the prevention of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, from early warning and early prevention to reconciliation in regions and countries which have experienced these crimes. Community leaders involved in dialogue and mediation initiatives can recognize existing grievances and identify risk factors at the earlier stages, serving as an important early warning tool for early action and response. Additionally, and as a result of this, dialogue and mediation initiatives can quickly respond to these early risks in order to address them before violence occurs or conflict escalates. On the other hand, dialogue and mediation can play a significant role in contexts where genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity have already happened, supporting peace and reconciliation initiatives that will build long-lasting peace.

As an experienced mediator, I know that mediation processes hardly ever recognize the risk factors of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. I know for a fact that to prevent genocide, these risk factors have to be mitigated, and the ability of parties in conflict to make war turned into an ability to make peace. I am also aware that there is an assumption that these crimes cannot be mediated. But this is not true. For this reason, I have prioritized, during my tenure as UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, a focus on how mediators can be better involved in the prevention of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. In this context, in 2024, my Office implemented a project to better understand the ways in which dialogue and mediation can advance such prevention efforts, and in particular how we could engage with and support mediators in their challenging work conducted on a daily basis, adding the prevention lenses. The project was intended to support dialogue and mediation mechanisms in contexts at risk of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, and to mainstream the prevention of these crimes in mediation practice.

In order to delve into these important questions and discuss opportunities for the future and key recommendations, we organized three dedicated consultations. The first meeting took place in March 2024 and focused on the interlinkages between mediation and the prevention of these crimes, as well as on challenges and missed opportunities related to using dialogue and mediation in situations at risk of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, or in situations where these crimes have been committed. The second meeting was held in May 2024, during which experts had the opportunity to identify missed opportunities and discuss practical recommendations on the use of mediation and dialogue to prevent genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. The third meeting took place in-person in Kigali, Rwanda, in November 2024, during which experts finalized reviewed the policy guidance and finalized the recommendations which are included in this document.

This *Policy Guidance on Promoting Dialogue and Mediation to Prevent Genocide, War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity* is the result of these expert discussions, and gathers 12 key, non-exhaustive recommendations. From developing clear strategies, thoughtfully assigning roles, involving civil society and youth groups, using symbolic actions, and promoting responsible media coverage, stakeholders can improve mediation efforts and help achieve sustaining peace in regions affected by conflict and situations at risk of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

This policy guidance is a call to action for all who believe in the power of prevention, diplomacy, the rule of law, and the enduring capacity of human beings to find common ground, even in the face of seemingly insurmountable differences. It is a reminder that while the threats we face may be grave, the tools of dialogue, negotiation, and mediation offer us a pathway to a future where peace is the norm, not the exception.

This policy guidance is a reminder that promoting dialogue and mediation is not merely about preventing violence in the short term—it is about laying the groundwork for addressing risk factors for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.



**Alice Wairimu Nderitu**

Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on  
the Prevention of Genocide

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# Preface

This Policy Guidance emerged as a result of the concerted effort and shared vision of the United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, and especially Special Adviser Alice Wairimu Nderitu, to enhance the capacity and effectiveness of the United Nations in mediation and dialogue, specifically in the prevention of socio-political identity conflicts that could lead to genocide and other atrocity crimes (war crimes and crimes against humanity). This initiative stems from my collaboration, during my tenure as Ambassador of the Republic of North Macedonia to the UN, and the Office of the Special Adviser. The document itself is the result of substantial contributions from relevant experts, whose ideas and constructive proposals were elaborated during two online meetings and a workshop held in Kigali in November 2024.

While a legal definition of genocide has been established and is utilized in international law, the conditions and acts of genocide may be at work long before the juridical conditions are fully met or recognized. This suggests that any form of prevention requires not only a juridical framing and identification but also work to prepare and promote dialogue and mediation long before violence occurs. To recall upon the words of the Special Advisor: “We know the risk factors for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity”. Indeed, it is not the lack of information about violations of rights that may lead to a genocide that is hampering prevention efforts – it is the lack of action. That’s why the fundamental problem in preventing and prosecuting genocide is neither technical nor legal, “but more a matter of political will”. This Policy Guidance seeks to support UN experts and bodies, equipping them with the skills to provide effective services and preventive tools for disputes and crises in pre-genocidal and genocidal contexts. Hence, it also aims to enhance the work of the UN in preventing this crime and protect human dignity.

The architecture of the document is structured around organizing knowledge and skills for the creation of mediation teams, as well as training mediators engaged in identity-based conflicts, with the goal of establishing dialogue and preventing the escalation of such conflicts. The document contains 12 recommendations organized around key themes, including the expertise of mediators; inclusivity and maintaining gender balance within mediation teams; appropriate selection and involvement of local actors therein; and knowledge, skills, and approaches in building trust to enable dialogue and prevent conflict escalation through mediation between conflicting parties.

I have no doubt that this Policy Guidance will become an important tool through which mediators (diplomats, experts, academics, NGO workers, and others) will acquire knowledge and skills, and UN bodies will be better prepared to face identity conflicts worldwide that risk escalating into genocide and other atrocity crimes.



**Ljubomir Frchkoski**  
SKOPJE 2024

# Introduction

*Dialogue and mediation are both crucial and central mechanisms in the prevention of genocide and related crimes (war crimes and crimes against humanity). Yet, many practitioners often lack a prevention lens that is essential to highlight not only dangerous risk factors but also the importance of the success of such initiatives.*

There are connections between mediation, dialogue, and prevention in general, and especially between mediation and prevention of genocide and related crimes (war crimes and crimes against humanity). First, the connection between mediation and prevention is direct and consequential. Mediation is one of the explicit measures contained in the Charter of the United Nations, specifically Chapter VI, as instrumental to the peaceful settlement of disputes. The range of non-coercive responses listed in that Chapter also include negotiation, enquiry, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means. A look at the world today makes it all too obvious that peaceful settlement of ongoing disputes would dramatically alter the risk of potential commission of such crimes for the better.

Experience shows that mediation and preventive diplomacy are most effective when organizations work together, speak with one voice, and use relative strengths in a complementary way. In the past, such arrangements have been used to facilitate dialogue aimed at stopping violence and preventing recurrence, promoting human rights, combating impunity, supporting national reconciliation and economic reconstruction, as well as engaging parties in conflict on specific protection issues, such as humanitarian access and security.

Prevention of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity is about addressing risk factors wherever and whenever they appear. In the field of prevention of these crimes, we have a range of tools that help identify such risk factors. The United Nations utilizes the Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes developed by the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention (OSAPG).

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The Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes lists risk factors which comprise indicators of structural or imminent risk. These include a history of conflict, long-standing structural discrimination, weak governance structures, a history of human rights violations, marginalization or exclusion of racial, ethnic and religious minorities or motivation or capacity to commit genocide and other atrocity crimes, among others. From OSAPG analysis, these risks can be reduced by mutually reinforcing activities in a range of areas, including efforts to improve the capacity of state institutions for early action; promote and protect human rights, including by eliminating all forms of discrimination; strengthen independence and oversight functions of rule of law institutions; and support accountability for past instances of such crimes to deter their recurrence. The most effective approaches to atrocity prevention are those that are inclusive and integrated, adaptive and flexible, and collaborative and sustained. In short, prevention of genocide and other atrocity crimes is supported by complimentary agendas, including dialogue and mediation.

When considering mediation and dialogue for the prevention of genocide and related crimes, context is important. The toolbox of potential assistance measures may be universal, but its application needs to be tailored to each specific situation at hand. Measures are most effective when they are focused on addressing specific problems or influencing specific individuals or groups. Timing matters too. Underlying risk factors must be addressed early through dialogue and mediation among other means. In many situations, windows of opportunity narrow or even close when crises emerge. Once societies plunge into instability, the political and temporal space to effectively address underlying risks shrinks rapidly and sometimes disappears entirely. It is important to ensure that mediation and dialogue measures which address risks are constantly assessed and adapted as needed in a timely manner.

Leadership also matters at every level. Atrocity prevention works best when it addresses risks at the local level, as soon as they become evident, working in concert with the national and international levels when needed. When these crimes are imminent, the degree to which global actors can make a difference – including in mediation and dialogue – depends on whether local and national leaders are willing to cooperate.

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As such, local ownership is critical, and early action usually succeeds only if it enjoys the support of the intended beneficiaries. International leadership matters too, since early action to prevent genocide and related crimes is more likely, and more effective, when states with the legitimacy and capacity to lead do so.

In many situations at risk of genocide and related crimes, dialogue and mediation are not necessarily conducted by formally trained practitioners with expertise in genocide or war crime prevention. Community leaders with local expertise are often called by circumstance to offer mediation and dialogue to prevent these crimes. Dialogue practitioners often emerge from a pool of people with existing authority such as teachers, health workers, agriculture, and livestock extension officers, religious, traditional and community leaders, and businesspeople.

Legitimacy and knowledge of the context by these community leaders is essential for the successful conduct of this important process. Building the capacity of community leaders in the prevention of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity will increase the impact and meaningfulness of their work. Advancing the skills of mediators and dialogue practitioners to include genocide and related crimes will also have a direct impact on mediation and conflict resolution processes. Indeed, dialogue and mediation are at the root of restoring communication, reconciliation, and social cohesion between communities at risk of genocide and related crimes.





# Methodology

The policy guidance on Promoting Dialogue and Mediation to Prevent Genocide and Related Crimes (War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity) is grounded on the principles of the consistent use of dialogue and mediation as tools to address grievances, enhance communication, foster social cohesion, and ultimately prevent genocide and related crimes; all of the above, by building an international community of learning and practice on dialogue and mediation for the prevention of such crimes, reflecting perspectives from different regions.

The main scope of this document is to champion global community knowledge and practices and to increase shared understanding of promoting dialogue and mediation in preventing genocide and related crimes. Highlighting best practices in dialogue and mediation, as applicable to the prevention of genocide and related crimes, and further elaborating these practices into practical recommendations, this policy guidance is designed with the aim of equipping practitioners with specific knowledge on how to incorporate a prevention lens in their work.

The policy guidance on *Promoting Dialogue and Mediation to Prevent Genocide and Related Crimes (War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity)* emerged as a result of the need for a tailored platform for dialogue and mediation as a preventive set of measures related to genocide and related crimes, with a focus on identity conflicts that challenge the work and meaning of the overall mandate of the United Nations. The policy guidance is the result of thorough discussions held during two expert meetings, convened in April and May of 2024. During these discussions, experts with specialized backgrounds discussed best practices and opportunities to inform how dialogue and mediation can be better applied in prevention efforts.

Some of the topics of interest that were discussed are the following:

- Interlinkages between mediation and the prevention of genocide and related crimes
- Main challenges and missed opportunities related to using dialogue and mediation in situations at risk of genocide or where genocide and related crimes have been committed
- Practical recommendations for enhancing capacities and strengthening the role of dialogue and mediation to reduce the risk of genocide and related crimes

In line with this, the policy guidance seeks to support dialogue and mediation mechanisms in contexts at risk of genocide and related crimes as well as mainstream prevention in mediation practice.

Finally, the development of this policy guidance has a twofold purpose: firstly, to explore ways in which dialogue and mediators' skills can be used in contexts at risk of genocide and related crimes to raise awareness, contribute to decision making and mobilize for collective action; and secondly, to initiate developing an archive of easily accessible data which will:

- \* Contribute to a database of experiences in the field of preventing genocide and related crimes through dialogue and mediation.
  - \* Provide material that will serve as the basis for research, analyses, trainings for experts and local practitioners on the use of dialogue and mediation to prevent genocide and related crimes.
  - \* Identify patterns, if any, and formulate and refine techniques to inform a "school" of mediation in preventing genocide and related crimes.
  - \* Provide interdisciplinary experiential learning opportunities linking communities, practitioners, and academics to explore approaches to the prevention of genocide and related crimes through dialogue and mediation.
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# Recommendations

Addressing genocide and related crimes requires a dual approach of prevention and prosecution. The development of this policy guidance for the use of dialogue and mediation is crucial in advancing the prevention of these crimes. The critical question is: How can vulnerable groups and communities be equipped with the knowledge to recognize and mitigate violence that may have genocidal intent?

Additionally, there are certain complexities of designing policy guidance for the use of dialogue and mediation in preventing genocide and related crimes with respect to identity conflicts. Genocide and related crimes should not be seen as ordinary violence within communities. These conflicts involve cultural differences, civilian targets, and extreme violence against women and girls. Mediation in such conflicts requires specific skills, psychology, political dynamics, techniques, local knowledge, and patience.

Dialogue and mediation, in contexts of cultural violence, should be seen as tools for prevention. The primary challenge in designing a policy guidance for dialogue and mediation lies in building trust within ongoing historical processes that (re-) shapes international relations and the overall global community. Mediation as a pedagogical task should bridge grassroots initiatives and high-level strategies, creating a just environment for communities. Reinventing mechanisms, tools, and frameworks to facilitate contemporary dialogue and mediation is essential. This involves focusing mandates on both intra-national and internal conflicts, emphasizing accountability, and exploring new actors or alliances, particularly from the Global South. This holistic approach is necessary to prevent genocide and related crimes effectively.

The aforementioned holistic approach to employing dialogue and mediation in preventing genocide and related crimes effectively builds upon layered premises of public policy, community life, and safe and secure living in equal and just democratic societies.

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The experts' meeting underscored the need to explore the interlinkages between prevention and mediation more thoroughly. The design of policy guidance for dialogue and mediation reflects unresolved questions about existing frameworks and tools that have yet to effectively embody prevention. Issues include the ineffectiveness of preventive diplomacy tools, the underutilization of early warning mechanisms, the role of international courts, and the problem of weapon supplies that exacerbate conflicts. The availability of funds for prevention is also a significant issue. Designing policy guidance involves interrogating current conditions and asking if existing tools and frameworks for early warning and response are outdated.

The challenge of aligning early warning mechanisms with institutional promptness and overcoming political interests and a lack of political will must be addressed. The gap between early warning signs and the occurrence of violence, as seen in the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, highlights the need for alignment between early warning and early response mechanisms. Supporting locally led mechanisms based on dialogue and mediation can provide crucial early warnings from local communities. An increased emphasis on prevention is crucial.

Centralizing the UN's legacy in mediation and prevention, with respect to institutional memory, can have a profound institutional impact. Questions related to memories of genocide often challenge institutional memory and the coordination and production of archives that render public horizons of justice. High-level articulated violence often diverges from the actual violence committed in communities. Dialogue and mediation should consider human emotions, such as fear, and aim to transform adversarial relationships into cooperative ones. The UN's archive of mediation as applied to the prevention of genocide and related crimes should be seen as a pedagogical project, always collecting and making public its findings to enhance understanding and justice.

Additionally, memory of conflict resolution as opposed to memory of fear and enmity goes along with institutional support for indigenous knowledge systems (such as the case with Ubuntu), should aim to create safe spaces for sharing difficult conditions and fostering understanding.





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The communal aspect of mediation is crucial in making it a non-isolationist process. Valuable analysis is required to understand who should be involved in mediation processes and how. Related to grounded knowledges, emerging from daily communal life, it is of crucial importance to recognize the role of women in dialogue and mediation. Mediation should be seen as a pedagogical task that bridges grassroots initiatives and high-level strategies. This requires rethinking archives, and genealogies of conflict to challenge narratives and promote justice for communities. Reinventing mechanisms, tools, and frameworks to foster dialogue and mediation involves focusing on intra-national conflicts, emphasizing accountability, and forming new alliances, particularly with the Global South.

Besides addressing present conditions, with respect to interlinkages between mediation, dialogue, and prevention, challenges in policy design, institutional memory, genealogies, and archives, as well as incorporating indigenous knowledge in conflict resolutions, what stands firmly is the need for capacity building. Robust and sustained funding for mediation training is critical. Advocating for funds means emphasizing the need for trained mediators capable of handling conflicts with patience, compassion, and the ability to listen. Equipping mediators with the necessary knowledge and maintaining their neutrality and convincing role is vital. Political solutions should not overshadow local healing and reconciliation processes.

The main scope of the recommendations is to present how effective dialogue and mediation can be essential in conflict prevention and resolution, with the aim of preventing genocide and related crimes.

And some of the basic principles that bridge prevention with mediation are:

-  Action should occur where the people are, addressing immediate and practical needs.
  -  People's voices through their needs must be heard and respected.
  -  Dialogue should be seen as an exit mechanism for antagonized local communities.
  -  Mediation should aim to balance power relations, moving from enmity to trust.
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By formulating clear strategies, carefully allocating actors, engaging civil society and youth groups, incorporating symbolic gestures, and fostering responsible media coverage, relevant stakeholders can enhance mediation efforts and contribute to lasting peace and stability in conflict-affected regions and in situations at risk of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The multifaceted exploration of the role of dialogue and mediation in preventing genocide and related crimes and deescalating violent conflicts includes tackling the early warning mechanisms, opting for ensuring mediator legitimacy, addressing challenges in isolated and militarized states, raising public awareness, and understanding community trauma, as elaborated in the following comprehensive recommendations for skilled mediators. It is important to implement these recommendations thoughtfully based on best practices to prevent exacerbating conflict.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS THAT CAN POSITION THE PERSPECTIVE ON HOW DIALOGUE AND MEDIATION CAN BE USED AS TOOLS AND MECHANISMS FOR PREVENTION OF GENOCIDE AND RELATED CRIMES:**

1. **Early Warning Mechanisms:** Establish and strengthen early warning systems that incorporate historical analysis and involve a wide range of stakeholders to identify and address potential genocide and related crimes early on. The experts' meetings discussion underscored the importance of early warning mechanisms for deescalating or intercepting violence that could lead to genocide or related crimes. These mechanisms should include analyzing conflict roots and histories of enmity and engaging diverse actors in the mediation process.

2. **Clarifying Mediation Strategies Including Pre-consultations with Vulnerable Groups:** Develop clear strategies that differentiate between preventive dialogue and resolving mediation, with an emphasis on building trust and promoting international norms. The distinction between preventive dialogue and resolving mediation needs to be clearly defined. Preventive dialogue can inform early warning mechanisms, while mediation efforts should focus on building trust and shifting narratives towards peaceful coexistence.

3. Integrating Dialogue, Mediation, and Reconciliation with Prevention: Promote early and continuous dialogue initiatives as part of preventive strategies, ensuring that mediation efforts are ready to step in when signs of escalation are detected. Acknowledging local efforts and encouraging dialogue and social healing among potential actors likely to engage or already engaging in the perpetration of genocide and related crimes is crucial. Dialogue should be framed as deep listening with capacity to understand rather than a plurality of monologues (debate). Early dialogue efforts and social healing can facilitate subsequent mediation by third parties, especially in scenarios of escalating violence or denial of the risk of genocide.

4. Strategy Formulation: Develop comprehensive strategies for preventive dialogue and mediation, incorporating diverse approaches informed by extra-political fields such as neuroscience. It is important to ensure that strategies are flexible and adaptable to evolving conflict dynamics and how they affect the individual and collective life of targeted communities, especially because negative tendency of repulsion, rejection or hatred can play just the same unifying role in group formation and identity as one of positive attraction. Incremental process design involving the community is likely to provide most effective and transformative outcomes.

5. Constituting the Mediation Team: Ensure gender equality and social inclusion of local community leaders in mediation efforts to enhance legitimacy and effectiveness. The legitimacy of mediators by including women among local community leaders is essential, as women provide perspectives and expertise that can enrich mediation and increase the likelihood of success for mediation outcomes.



6. Actor Allocation: Carefully select and allocate actors involved in the mediation process, on basis of their positionality, relevance and vulnerability, considering their legitimacy and ability to engage with potential perpetrators. Prioritize transparency and accountability in mediator selection to enhance public trust and confidence in the process. Due consideration should be given to the positionality of different actors in mediation process. The involvement of international actors can be critical in situations where there is a trust-confidence deficit and each side avoids projecting weakness in their posture. Engaging international actors should not complicate or create further challenges to mediation initiatives. Principles on inclusion should be established to avoid making compromises that would risk excluding vulnerable groups.

7. Engagement of Civil Society and Youth Groups: Harness the potential of civil society organizations, faith-based organizations, the private sector, think tanks including women, people with disabilities (PWDs) and youth groups in combating hate speech and promoting social cohesion. Appropriate knowledge of the history, risk factors and populations at risk should guide the selection of mediators. Their active engagement can help overcome barriers to dialogue and foster a culture of dialogue, peace and understanding.

8. Public Communication: Recognize the role of media in shaping public perceptions and responses to conflict. Foster constructive media coverage that promotes peacebuilding efforts and highlights the positive outcomes of mediation processes. Encourage responsible reporting that avoids sensationalism and contributes to conflict de-escalation. Develop a media strategy to include traditional media and social media at various levels that will proactively support and report on the mediation process.

9. Education and Public Awareness: Implement educational programs of culture of dialogue and public awareness campaigns to sensitize communities, leaders, and stakeholders about the risks of genocide and the importance of prevention. Raising awareness about genocide and related crimes through education as well as cultural dialogue and public discourse at all levels is crucial. This involves integrating discussions about risks and solutions into everyday communication without assigning blame and highlighting the importance of educating the younger generations, especially through visiting memorial sites.



10. Recognizing Trauma: Train mediators to recognize and understand the impact of trauma on communities, ensuring that mediation processes are sensitive to and are aware of the lived experiences of affected populations. Understanding the impact of trauma on communities and conflict parties is vital for effective mediation. Mediators must be aware of the affective potential of trauma and work closely with communities to address it. Mediators also need mental health support.

11. Symbolic Gestures, Rituals and Ceremonies: Acknowledge the importance of symbolic gestures, rituals and ceremonies in community reconciliation and social healing processes. Incorporate these elements into mediation efforts to address deep-rooted grievances and foster reconciliation. Allow the opening of space for memory expression towards a collective memory. Insider-reconcilers using indigenous practices and ceremony to advance social healing can be useful in mediation processes. And recognize that insiders do not need to become mediator but can remain partial.

12. Create Archives: prepare written documents highlighting key elements of mediation processed and share them with institutions and wider society for memory and transparency purposes as well as for increasing the sustainability and continuity of these processes.





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