



United Nations
Office on Genocide Prevention
and the Responsibility to Protect

Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide

Strategy and Priorities 2023 - 2026



osapg@un.org



United Nations Headquarters, 405 East
42nd Street, New York, NY 10017, USA



[@UNOSAPG](https://www.un.org/en/sections/dpa/osapg/)

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Foreword

A programmatic approach on prevention of genocide and related crimes

Effective delivery of the Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide's (OSAPG) mandate depends on adaptability of approaches to the present and future. The mandate advances the priorities established in the United Nations (UN) *New Agenda for Peace, Our Common Agenda, and the Sustainable Development Goals*. This approach drives effective, efficient, financial, and human resource management systems. Regular consultations with stakeholders ensure incorporation of best practice and adaptability of approaches.

The Secretary General (SG), Antonio Guterres has emphasized the need for renewed commitments to climate emergency, digital disruption, and inequality. The OSAPG Strategy and Priorities is a living document well placed to take on new ideas articulated in the SG's vision for rejuvenating UN organizations, providing better support to Member States, and turbocharging progress on the Sustainable Development Goals as articulated in **Policy Brief on UN 2.0**. The SG emphasizes fast tracking of women's full, equal, and meaningful participation in all process including in prevention of genocide and related crimes through bold leadership and targeted measures that address entrenched management practices to build a common culture.

OSAPG's programmatic approach is conceptual, operational, and agenda setting. Research, policy advocacy, legislative reform, enhancing compliance with the *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, and institutional strengthening are key cornerstones. In this new approach, **translating the concept of genocide prevention as an international norm into a practical reality implemented at the national and regional levels that can also be implemented at the community level is a necessity.** Community driven prevention based on local knowledge on sources of identity divides contributes to sustainable change. Informed by climate change and wars fought with weapons integrating artificial intelligence, we are using new technologies in analysis for purposes of early warning. We are fostering inclusive dialogues, countering, and address hate speech for which OSAPG is the UN global focal point.

To prevent genocide, early engagement and addressing root causes is essential. As situations escalate, options for preventative action lessen and risks of cycles of violence becoming embedded and escalatory increase. A systematic approach to prevention of genocide and related crimes centralizes collaborative partnerships in programmatic measures to address identity-based grievances. Article 1 of the Genocide Convention states "that genocide, whether committed in time of peace or in time of war, is a crime under international law which they undertake to prevent and to punish." Prevention of genocide is not the same as peacebuilding and conflict prevention as genocides happen both during war and peace. Convergences between conflict prevention and the prevention of genocide however exist. Our new programmatic approach provides for focus where the convergence occurs, on prevention of genocide in both conflict and non-conflict settings, to identify and bring attention to risks of genocide before they occur.

Alice Wairimu Nderitu

Under Secretary General and Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide

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What is the mandate, conceptual and normative framework for the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide?



Genocide, the crime of identity violence, was named by Raphael Lemkin, a Polish Jewish lawyer, who also devoted his entire life to obtaining its recognition and condemnation.[1] Largely through Lemkin's efforts Genocide was first recognized as a crime under international law in 1946 by the UN General Assembly (GA), [A/RES/96-I](#).



It was codified as an independent crime in the [1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide](#) defining Genocide as the deliberate destruction of a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, in part or in whole that may occur in times of peace, as well as in the context of war.



The International Court of Justice (ICJ) states that the Convention embodies principles as part of general customary international law therefore all States who have or have not ratified the Genocide Convention are bound by the principle that genocide is a crime prohibited under international law. The prohibition of genocide is a peremptory norm of international law (*or jus cogens*) and consequently, no derogation from it is allowed.



The Independent Inquiries into the actions of the UN during the genocides against the Tutsi in Rwanda (S/1999/1257) and the Srebrenica Genocide in the Balkans (A/54/549) in the 1990s demonstrated that the United Nations had failed to protect the populations.



In 2001 the UN Security Council (SC) in S/RES/1366 (2001) invited the SG "to refer to the Council information and analyses within the United Nations system on cases of serious violations of international law" and on "potential conflict situations" arising from "ethnic, religious and territorial disputes" and other related issues.



In 2004, on the tenth anniversary of the Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, the SG launched an Action Plan to Prevent Genocide and in consideration of the previous Council's request, appointed the first Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide (SAPG) through a letter addressed by the SG to the President of the SC (S/2004/567) referencing the source of the mandate as Security Council resolution 1366 (2001).

[1] Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposal for Redress* (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944). Dominik J. Schaller and Jürgen Zimmerer, eds., *The Origins of Genocide: Raphael Lemkin as a Historian of Mass Violence* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2009).

Outline of the mandate for the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide

The source of the mandate is Security Council resolution 1366 (2001), in particular the following paragraphs:

“(a) the eighteenth preambular paragraph, in which the Council acknowledged the lessons to be learned for all concerned from the failure of preventive efforts that preceded such tragedies as the genocide in Rwanda and resolved to take appropriate action within its competence to prevent the recurrence of such tragedies;

(b) paragraph 5, in which the Council expressed its willingness to give prompt consideration to early warning or prevention cases brought to its attention by the Secretary-General;

(c) paragraph 10, in which the Council invited the Secretary-General to refer to the Council information and analyses from within the United Nations system on cases of serious violations of international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law and on potential conflict situations arising, inter alia, from ethnic, religious and territorial disputes, poverty and lack of development, and expressed its determination to give serious consideration to such information and analyses regarding situations which it deems to represent a threat to international peace and security.

The Special Adviser will (a) collect existing information, in particular from within the United Nations system, on massive and serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law of ethnic and racial origin that, if not prevented or halted, might lead to genocide; (b) act as a mechanism of early warning to the Secretary-General, and through him to the Security Council, by bringing to their attention potential situations that could result in genocide; (c) make recommendations to the Security Council, through the Secretary-General, on actions to prevent or halt genocide; (d) liaise with the United Nations system on activities for the prevention of genocide and work to enhance the United Nations capacity to analyse and manage information relating to genocide or related crimes.

The methodology employed would entail a careful verification of facts and serious political analyses and consultations, without excessive publicity. This would help the Secretary-General define the steps necessary to prevent the deterioration of existing situations into genocide. The Special Adviser would not make a determination on whether genocide within the meaning of the Convention had occurred. The purpose of his activities, rather, would be practical and intended to enable the United Nations to act in a timely fashion.”

The SAPG also participates in inter-departmental and inter agency meetings on conflict prevention and thematic and in-country specific task forces.

Normative Framework

In addition to the mandate, the legal framework for the mandate of the SAPG is drawn from:



The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.



The wider body of international human rights law, international humanitarian law, and international criminal law.



Relevant resolutions of the GA^[2], the SC the HRC and the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document.

Determination of whether a genocide is occurring or has occurred.

The mandate of the SAPG is on prevention not adjudication. The SAPG cannot pronounce whether a genocide has occurred or is occurring and or make a determination if a particular situation amounts to genocide or other related crimes. This is the mandate of judicial institutions with the relevant jurisdiction. This limitation is a practical directive consistent with the preventive character of the mandate.

[2] 29th September 2015, GA established 9th December as the International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime; 26th January 2018, the GA designated 7 April as the International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, recalling also that Hutu and other who opposed it were killed and on 23 May 2024, the GA designated 11th July as the International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica.

2 What are our values and promise to those that engage with us?



Our overall values are those enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and build upon the promise and aspiration the Charter represents. Our work is also inspired by the commitment of “Never Again” and the lessons learned from the collective failure to prevent the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda and the 1995 Srebrenica genocide. It is on the basis of those lessons learned that the mandate of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide was established, and it is from the specific deficits identified at the time that the distinct elements in the mandate were crafted. Operationally, our programmatic approach relies on the following core values: prevention, protection, impartiality, innovation, adaptability, gender equity, geographical diversity, humility, supporting processes with a field and community perspective, continuous learning and innovation, accountability, action, impact, and agenda setting.

The Office is committed to make all possible efforts to ensure full mandate delivery in all of its four components: collect and analyze information, alert and raise alarm, advise and make recommendations, and work with the rest of the United Nations system to enhance our collective capacity for prevention. The Office is also committed to work with partners at the country level to achieve effective and sustainable change.

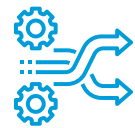
3 What is our Analysis Question?



The Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide protects ‘national, ethnical, racial and religious’ groups from intentional destruction. The starting point for the collection and analysis of information is the legal definition of the crime of genocide according to the Convention and the concept of “populations at risk.” Information needs to point towards the existence of a national, ethnic, racial or religious group that is especially vulnerable to acts of violence – either imminent or actual – or to conditions of life that may result in its destruction as a group. Prevention of genocide requires early-warning based on indicators or warning signs pointing toward situations that risk deteriorating.

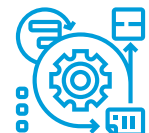
To constitute genocide there must be a proven intent by perpetrators to physically destroy those deliberately targeted because of real or perceived membership in the protected groups. To prevent genocide, it is critically important to understand root causes. While conflict has many causes, **genocidal violence is identity based** occurring in socially polarized, populist, xenophobic, and authoritarian spaces. The most prominent and common factor in situations where genocide has been committed is State policy, complicity or failure. These conflicts are fomented by privatization of security, discrimination, hate speech, inciting violence, and other violations.

4 What is our Theory of Change?



Genocides are planned, require organization, and constitute a deliberate strategy. Employing the full range of resources for predictive and action-oriented analysis to recognize signs on how genocides occur, in collaboration with the UN system and in partnership with international, regional, national, and local stakeholders, contributes to the prevention of genocide and related crimes. Theory of change requires putting in motion prevention forces and dynamics which can effect change not only in the short-term – aimed at addressing immediate protection and prevention needs – but also in the medium and the long-term – aimed at modifying structural risk factors and concerns. For this, assistance and empowerment of local actors constitutes a key priority for effective, sustainable change.

5 What methodology implements the Mandate of Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide?



OSAPG identifies situations at risk of genocide based on the main policy documents the *Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes* and the *United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech*. This informs analysis, advocacy and mobilization, raising awareness and capacity building.

In respect to the *Framework of Analysis*, this tool allows the Office to identify the extent to which a series of structural or dynamic risk factors and indicators are present in any given situation. A consistent use of the Framework permits consideration as well of the extent to which any given situation is advancing positively or deteriorating over time. While the mandate of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide calls for information collection primarily from within the UN system, the Framework permits cooperation with external partners for purposes of collecting information as well. Both in terms of working within the UN system and with external partners, the Framework can also serve as a platform for identification of response options on the basis of assessed strategic or programmatic needs.

In respect to the *United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech*, this document informs the Office's coordination of the entire UN system in addressing and countering hate speech and provides the basis for our Office's technical and programmatic support to UN field presences in the development of country-specific Plans of Action on Hate Speech. This document, presenting lines of action to address the different dimensions of this phenomenon, is also instrumental in the provision of assistance by our Office to Member States and regional organizations in their efforts to tackle hate speech, at their request.

6 What opportunities and challenges exist to prevent genocide and related crimes?

The prevention of genocide and related crimes, while constituting a key global priority, as articulated in a number of policy documents and resolutions by United Nations intergovernmental organs, also constitutes a sensitive strategic and operational field of work. Maximizing on opportunities for the implementation of timely and effective prevention initiatives is therefore critical. Likewise, addressing challenges early on can contribute significantly to the sustainability and impact of such prevention work.

Opportunities for the prevention of genocide and related crimes include:

- a) A specific UN SC mandate for SAPG, reporting to the SG, on the prevention of genocide.
- b) Consistency by OSAPG in framing discourse and policy development.
- c) Preventative actors such as civil society, media, religious leaders with knowledge on risk factors/early warning signs for genocide.
- d) Existing structural and operational preventive measures implemented by States, regional and international organizations.
- e) Diplomatic efforts at bilateral and multilateral levels to address underlying identity grievances and mediate conflicts before they escalate into violence.
- f) Normative frameworks on genocide and other human rights and international humanitarian law.
- g) Strong analytical, preventive, capacities within the United Nations system.
- h) UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes with mandates to prevent conflict including peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts stabilizing situations and creating conditions for dialogue and reconciliation.
- i) Intergovernmental bodies in UN system, such as the GA, HRC, SC.
- j) International criminal justice mechanisms for accountability and deterrence.
- k) Targeted sanctions against individuals and entities responsible for inciting or committing genocide.
- l) Education and capacity building on causes and consequences of genocide.
- m) Addressing hate speech, propaganda, and misinformation that fuels identity divisions.
- n) Providing support and protection to refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) fleeing identity-based conflict.
- o) Strengthening international cooperation and coordination.

Challenges to be addressed for effective implementation of prevention initiatives include:

- a)** Persistent political sensitivities towards the crime of genocide and related crimes limiting information sharing, access and mobilizing for action.
- b)** Lack of political will for diplomatic interventions.
- c)** Geo-political interests and national sovereignty concerns hindering preventive responses.
- d)** Inadequate global financial, logistical and human resources essential to preventive efforts.
- e)** Contexts of complex conflicts involving multiple actors, deep rooted identity grievances and historical animosities.
- f)** Misinformation, hate speech and propaganda spread through traditional and social media.
- g)** Security concerns hindering humanitarian aid and protection to vulnerable populations.
- h)** Difficulties in achieving consensus and coordinated action among diverse stakeholders for preventive efforts.
- i)** Insufficient global investment in prevention and early action until the concern becomes a crisis.
- j)** Digital technology, including drones, artificial intelligence and social media platforms playing a crucial role in modern warfare.
- k)** Absence of a universally acceptable threshold on determining when to intervene and prevent.
- l)** Difficulties in collecting regular, updated, and reliable information on genocide and related crimes.
- m)** Increased use of violence against civilians, especially women, children, and minorities.
- n)** Increased conflicts between non-state actors such as ethnic militias.
- o)** Thriving war economies.
- p)** Exacerbation of conflicts through undermining local livelihoods by the climate change crisis.

7 What are the outcomes we seek to transform by 2026?

Implementing the programmatic strategy and priorities will deliver five outcomes critical to the prevention of genocide. These outcomes are:



Outcome 1

Production of timely analysis to support decision-making making including using new technologies, behavior science and predictive insights.



Outcome 2

The UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech widely disseminated and implemented at the community, national regional and international levels.



Outcome 3

Production of capacity building tools in partnership with research policy and educational institutions.



Outcome 4

Women, youth, men and the whole of society equipped with essential skills to identify, prevent and proactively address risk factors for genocide and related crimes.



Outcome 5

A value based well-resourced programmatic approach inspiring public trust and confidence, emphasizing a result oriented, efficient team working with collaborative partnerships.