

Editors' Introduction

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Recommended Citation

Irvin-Erickson, Douglas; Gudehus, Christian; Braden, Susan; DiGeorgio-Lutz, Joann; Zylberman, Lior; and Kritz, Brian (2018)
"Editors' Introduction," *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal*: Vol. 11: Iss. 3: 1-2.

DOI:

<http://doi.org/10.5038/1911-9933.11.3.1590>

Available at: <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/gsp/vol11/iss3/3>

Editors' Introduction

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This issue of *Genocide Studies and Prevention*, titled “Global Approaches to Atrocity Prevention: Theory, Practice, and the State of the Field,” presents a critical overview of the current state of Atrocity Prevention around the world. The issue was conceived of in mid-2016 by Douglas Irvin-Erickson and James P. Finkel, with the hope of responding to two immediate needs in scholarship and practice. First, we felt, scholars can always benefit from the perspectives of practitioners, officials, and others with experience working in various bureaucracies—while practitioners and policy makers could benefit from scholarship that helps them critically reflect on their work. Secondly, very little research was being conducted on the sudden outburst of energy around the world (over the past five years) to create national-level government, governmental, and civil-society institutions (with clear institutional connections to governments) dedicated to the prevention of genocide and mass atrocities.

Why there has been such little scholarship on these national mechanisms is a matter of speculation. Perhaps the horrors of mass atrocities and genocide in Syria, South Sudan, Iraq, Myanmar, and many other places, cast a shadow over these bright spots? Whatever the reason, the editorial board of GSP felt it was important to try and cast a spotlight on some of the positive developments around the world in the area of atrocity prevention. Even when the authors in this special issue feel that the institutions and “mechanisms” they are writing about might be failing to meet their goals or fulfill their mandates, there is nevertheless a collective sense that hundreds of millions of people around the world have a stake in the success of these efforts.

How far has the field of genocide and atrocity prevention come in the last decade? Readers are encouraged to peruse back issues of GSP to get a sense for just how much the state of the field has evolved—looking especially to the first issue of the journal dedicated exclusively to atrocity prevention, issue 2.1 published in 2007.¹ Now, there are national level mechanisms for atrocity prevention (or other national-level officially established bodies that include representatives from different areas of government relevant to the prevention of atrocity crimes) in Argentina, Burundi, Canada, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Germany, Kenya, Mexico, Paraguay, Switzerland, Tanzania, the United States, Uganda, and many others. Most of these national-level mechanism, such as the Ugandan National Committee for Genocide and Atrocity Prevention, are focused primarily on the prevention of mass atrocities domestically in their own national communities. Others, like the United States’ Atrocity Prevention Board, are exclusively concerned with the prevention of mass atrocities outside of the country. Others still, such as the Swiss national body, integrate both foreign and domestic prevention efforts into their mandate.

There are also many international and regional mechanisms for atrocity prevention, working in various capacities (and in various directions), including the United Nation’s Office on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the African Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, and so forth. Of course, these institutions and organizations have their own agendas, and are certainly not working synchronously. In some instances, they even seem to be contradicting each other. Yet, in one way or another, genocide and atrocity prevention is now part of their mandates.

The authors who responded to our call for papers issued in 2016 represent some of the leading international scholars in the field. The editors were pleased to see many of the above-mentioned cases covered in the submissions, and we hope this issue will inspire GSP’s readers to submit research on those efforts left out of this issue. What makes this issue especially valuable is the profile of the contributors. Some of the authors consider themselves atrocity prevention practitioners, and many have years of experience working in government or international organizations.

¹ Herb Hirsch, “Editor’s Introduction,” *Genocide Studies and Prevention*, 2, no. 1 (2007), 1-6.

Finally, we would like to thank the guest editor James P. Finkel for working tirelessly with the authors to produce this issue. We also extend a special thanks to our anonymous peer reviewers for their considerable efforts.

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