

Early Warning for Protection

Technologies and Practice for the
Prevention of Mass Atrocity Crimes

OUTCOME DOCUMENT



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Prevention of Mass Atrocity Crimes

Outcome Document

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This outcome document was written by Dr Phoebe Wynn-Pope and Steph Cousins.

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Executive summary

The *Early Warning for Protection* conference brought together non-government organisations and civil society organisations working with communities under threat of violence, with United Nations (UN) actors and technology specialists to explore interdisciplinary ways to prevent mass atrocities.

Conference participants analysed ways to identify early warning signs and signals and develop and implement effective early responses to those warnings. They also investigated the use of new technologies to facilitate early warning, early response, and community preparedness, building on lessons learned by the disaster management community.

The conference was held within the context of the now well-established principle of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). By examining how to enhance early warning for the prevention of mass atrocities, conference participants explored effective implementation of the R2P and how the principle may lend authority to actions taken for the prevention of atrocity crimes and the protection of communities from those crimes.

Early warning for protection is essentially about communicating the right information to the right people at the right time, enabling them to make the right decisions to prevent violence and protect themselves or others from the worst effects. Conference participants heard about formal and organisational early warning systems, as well as the many organic forms of early warning that have existed in communities for centuries and remain in use in many circumstances.

While early warning mechanisms and systems are diverse, they share common underpinnings. Throughout conference discussions it became evident that communication — getting the right information to the right people at the right time — is the most important element in effective early warning. Communication can occur between communities, between stakeholders working in communities, between governments, between regional organisations, and between those with information and those without. This communication should be vertical and horizontal: information should flow up to decision-makers and down to communities at risk (vertical communication) and between communities (horizontal communication)

enabling them to share knowledge of risks, act in their own interests, and collaborate where possible to prepare and protect themselves. New technologies provide an unprecedented opportunity to facilitate this horizontal communication.

Three types of early warning mechanisms and systems were examined at the conference. The first is a more traditional form usually undertaken by an institution or organisation involved in information collection and analysis for the purpose of enabling early responses to emerging crises. This form is referred to as a formal or structural organisational early warning system. The second is also well established but more organic and includes community-based informal mechanisms that have historically provided information between and to communities at risk. The third involves newly emerging systems that use real-time technology-based early warning. These systems are often related to imminent and actual crises and are not necessarily strong on predictive analysis, although they are increasingly developing mechanisms for this. Each of these systems has benefits and risks, and a role to play — none alone provides a solution to the prevention of mass atrocities. How these systems and mechanisms interact in different environments for maximum benefit remains an emerging practice.

Transforming early warning into effective and timely protective action is a complicated process and conference participants identified several significant challenges. One of these is the abundance of information about complex phenomena combined with limited knowledge and understanding of what the information means. How to accurately predict patterns of behaviour that will result in systematic violence requires highly sophisticated contextual analysis that is not always available. Other challenges identified included temporal issues around when to warn, which also requires an understanding of the risks of over-warning leading to neglected alerts, and under-warning leading to surprise and a lack of preventive or preparatory action. The need to establish mechanisms that enhance local capacity to warn and be warned was also a key focus.

Regardless of which early warning mechanism is

activated, an effective and appropriate early response is essential for an early warning system to work. Depending on the circumstances, responses will need to occur at different levels: local, national, regional and international. At the international level, responses are guided through diplomatic negotiations, between states, and within international organisations such as the UN. Response to early warning can also be instigated by pressure at a local or national level, and conference participants heard that local dispute resolution was often the most effective form of protection for vulnerable populations.

One of the lessons that emerged from the conference was that well designed humanitarian and development programs working with local communities at risk can have a lasting, preventive and protective impact. Structural and institutional responses to early warning are likely to be supported by more organic responses that all communities living under threat of violence may use.

Community preparedness was a well-explored topic. The need to work with communities and assist them to prepare for the onset of violence was recognised, but controversial. On the one hand, preparing a community for violence can be seen as shifting the protection responsibilities of states onto the communities themselves. On the other hand, the international development and humanitarian communities are often not present or are substantially scaled down by the time mass atrocity crimes are committed and so communities must rely on domestic and local mechanisms for their own protection. Careful preparation for such an eventuality can either avoid or mitigate the impact of violence.

Advocacy towards state officials and other protection duty-bearers is another important tool for closing the gap between early warning and early response. Advocacy can be direct in the form of dialogue between conflicting state officials, parties, mediators, or monitors providing protection to the community, and indirect through the mobilisation of international campaigns to influence and, if necessary, put pressure on leaders. Conference participants heard examples of both and recognised the importance of advocacy as another means of providing a rapid and effective response to early warning.

Several matters for further consideration were identified at the conference:

1. Conceptual clarity is needed regarding early warning for the prevention of mass atrocities, R2P, and protection more broadly. These concepts are closely related although the relationships are still not well understood.
2. The prevention of mass atrocities — at least structural prevention — does not fall neatly into either development or emergency/humanitarian practice. However, there is a need for greater convergence between humanitarian and development approaches to help prevent mass atrocities, and protect vulnerable communities from the commission of these crimes.
3. There are untapped opportunities for collaboration between development and humanitarian non-government organisations (NGOs) and conflict early-warning practitioners — particularly those practitioners who are developing and using new technologies — although such collaboration is not without risk to humanitarian principles and practice.
4. The humanitarian community has much to learn from civil society organisations working to support community self-protection, preparedness and prevention through conflict transformation.

The complexities of early warning for the prevention of mass atrocities were highlighted throughout the conference. The broader temporal issues around what constitutes early warning contrasted starkly with crisis mapping projects that record events and incidents as they unfold in real time. The need for both vertical and horizontal communication and for appropriate and timely responses to warning increased the difficulties facing practitioners. While R2P provides a framework for action — giving the international community a globally agreed principle of mutual responsibility when faced with genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and ethnic cleansing — it is now the responsibility of all involved to improve their understanding of the issues and complexities involved in the prevention of mass atrocity crimes and to work towards more effective responses.

Introduction

In November 2010, the *Early Warning for Protection: Technologies and Practice for the Prevention of Mass Atrocity Crimes* conference was held over two days in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

The conference was part of a wider project managed by Oxfam Australia to examine the role of NGOs and civil society in preventing mass atrocity crimes and deepen understanding of the meaning and relevance of the R2P principle to civil society. More than 120 delegates from 30 countries participated. A list of keynote speakers and contributors can be found in *Annex 1*.

The project consisted of two parts. Firstly, a workshop was held in Melbourne in November 2009 that brought together Australian NGOs, international organisations and government representatives to explore whether there is a role for NGOs in the effective implementation of R2P.

The workshop conclusions acknowledged many difficulties for NGOs engaging with R2P,¹ but found there was a role for NGOs to play, particularly in early warning for the prevention of the four R2P crimes. It was with reference to this concept of early warning that the second part of the project, the *Early Warning for Protection* conference, began to take form.

Purpose of outcome document

The purpose of this outcome document is to record the main themes and issues explored in the *Early Warning for Protection* conference to improve documentation and understanding about early warning and early response for the prevention of mass atrocity crimes.

This document will examine various early warning systems and mechanisms identified during the conference, from more traditional systems using information and analysis, to existing informal mechanisms that can be found in and among communities, and finally contemporary systems involving new technologies that provide instant mapping and information but at times involve less contextual analysis.

While it was not our intent to propose recommendations or initiatives for ongoing investigation or implementation, in the process of analysing conference outcomes, the

organisers have identified areas warranting further study and research. These areas are outlined in the *Matters for further consideration* section. We would welcome feedback from any practitioners or researchers looking to explore these issues further.

Conference overview

The *Early Warning for Protection* conference aimed to bring NGOs, including civil society organisations working with communities under threat of violence, together with UN actors and technology specialists to explore interdisciplinary ways to prevent mass atrocities. The conference explored ways for practitioners to identify early warning signs and signals and develop and implement effective early responses to those warnings. The conference also aimed to build on the lessons of the disaster management community about how to use new technologies to facilitate early warning, early response and community preparedness.

With this in mind, the conference held four substantive sessions. The first session aimed to explore traditional conflict early warning systems, how NGOs and civil society actors could contribute to and benefit from those systems and where existing systems need to be improved. This session also looked at the adequacy of response mechanisms and protocols in place for when early warning has been issued.

The second session looked at the potential of new technologies to improve and enhance conflict early warning and provided a platform for participants to debate the benefits and the risks of those technologies.

The third session concentrated on learning from and working with communities at risk of mass atrocity crimes. The purpose of this session was to ensure that the early warning mechanisms and responses are appropriate to the realities faced by communities and responsive to their needs.

The final session focused on the means available to NGOs and civil society to influence duty-bearers and decision-makers, including UN and government actors, to respond to early warning signs and endeavour to prevent mass atrocity crimes.



Mr Neou Kassie (L), a prominent survivor of the Cambodian genocide, speaks with Mr Francis Deng (R), Special Advisor to the Secretary General for the Prevention of Genocide. Photo: Stephen McLoughlin/APCR2P.

Throughout the conference there were recurring ideas and themes, all of which contributed to the idea that communication is the most important element in effective early warning. Communication is central to the very idea of early warning for protection. In traditional early warning systems, getting the right information to the right people at the right time requires credible data, solid contextual analysis and effective communication systems linking analysts with decision-makers capable of triggering early response. In more contemporary and new technology-based systems, communication is more diffuse but still critical to the effectiveness of the systems.

Directly related to this is the idea that early warning communication should not only be “vertical” but also “horizontal”. Information flows should be vertical — up to decision-makers and influential organisations that may be

able to effect change through diplomatic or other means — and down to communities so that they are informed about escalating violence. But so too communication should be horizontal between communities, enabling them to share knowledge of risks and have the capacity, therefore, to act in their own interests and collaborate where possible to prepare and protect themselves. New technologies perhaps provide an unprecedented opportunity to facilitate this horizontal communication, but access to this technology in some environments remains a barrier and challenge.

Before exploring how these ideas unfolded throughout the conference it is important to understand the Responsibility to Protect principle and its relationship to early warning.

Responsibility to Protect: an agreed but contested principle

The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) is now a well-established international principle. Notwithstanding, R2P remains a highly political concept, and operational difficulties regarding the effective implementation of the principle are well recognised.

Still, the conceptual advancement that the principle represents should not be underestimated. R2P affirms the responsibility to protect communities against the crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and ethnic cleansing is directly in the hands of each individual sovereign state. At the same time it recognises that the international community has a responsibility to encourage and assist states via peaceful means to fulfil their responsibility to protect, and assist the UN to establish an early warning capability in this respect.² Where states are manifestly failing to protect their citizens from R2P crimes and peaceful means are inadequate, the international community is prepared to take collective action through the UN Security Council, including military intervention.³

This represents an important conceptual shift. In 1994 there was no agreement by the international community that it had a responsibility to assist or intervene in Rwanda, even when the government had so clearly failed to protect its population. But while states and the international community have now for the most part accepted their responsibility to protect, there is less agreement about what accountability to this principle looks like in practice. The UN Secretary General's *Implementing the Responsibility to Protect* report, published in 2009, went a long way towards demystifying the operational realities of R2P and usefully broke the responsibilities down into three pillars.⁴ Nevertheless, there is a long way to go to distill states' R2P obligations and hold states accountable to them.

Given R2P is so heavily focused on the obligations of states, it may appear that NGOs have a limited role in this context. However, like all duties ascribed to sovereign states, the reality is that national authorities are often unable to fulfil their responsibilities without the assistance, participation and active mobilisation of the non-government sector and civil society. To deny NGOs a role in R2P, then, would be to deny the often pivotal role NGOs perform in the development and support of any community.

Given the politicised nature of R2P, it can be challenging for humanitarian organisations to promote the principle despite their obvious commitment to the protection of civilians from mass atrocity crimes. Invoking R2P can be perceived as inherently a political act and therefore incompatible with the humanitarian principle of neutrality. The flip side of this argument is that preventing the world's worst human atrocities is strongly aligned with the humanitarian imperative. Accordingly, calling on states and the international community to fulfil their responsibilities to this end is fundamentally consistent with humanitarian principles.

The question, then, is how civil society and NGOs can have the most impact with regard to R2P. What is their most appropriate form of engagement? The answer is most assuredly the mitigation and prevention of the conditions that enable or lead to the commission of mass atrocity crimes. When situations become violent, there is unfortunately little NGOs and civil society can physically do to protect communities from perpetrators, other than potentially providing protection through presence and advocacy.⁵ Emphasis on early warning and prevention, therefore, is an important focus for NGOs and civil society as an adjunct to the responsibilities held by states under R2P.

At the same time it must be recognised that NGOs and civil society cannot substitute for the responsibility of states, and allow states to renege on their fundamental obligations. Linked to this, R2P is often misrepresented as suggesting that where a state manifestly fails in its duty the responsibility passes to the international community. On the contrary, the responsibilities of the international



Mr Noel Morada, Executive Director of the Asia-Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. Photo: Ben Murphy/OxfamAUS.

community *and* individual states are “concurrent and enduring”.⁶ That is, the state retains its responsibility to protect at all times and cannot give up its responsibility. Within this framework, NGOs and civil society are able to support and develop local capacity, thereby strengthening states’ wherewithal to fulfil their responsibility. It is important, however, that NGOs and civil society reinforce states’ responsibilities even where they are actively assisting in the fulfilment of that responsibility.

When determining roles for NGOs, civil society and the broader international community in preventing the four R2P crimes, it is also important not to confuse conflict prevention with atrocity prevention. There have been times when conflict prevention approaches have been insufficiently focused on addressing the structural causes of mass atrocities to enable accurate prediction and preparation, such as in Rwanda in 1994. Then there have been other times when atrocities have been committed

outside the context of conflict, such as in Kyrgyzstan in 2010.⁷ As such, a blanket “conflict prevention” approach is unlikely to be sufficient to prevent mass atrocities. Nevertheless the prospect of R2P crimes occurring still escalates within an environment of armed conflict, and therefore the prevention of armed conflict can be an important factor in the prevention of mass atrocity crimes. The key is for actors to be aware of the factors that give rise to mass atrocity crimes within the context of armed conflict and be capable of raising and responding to early warning of imminent attacks.⁸

Finally, skepticism and questions regarding R2P’s utility remain. Does R2P make a real difference in the lives of people vulnerable to the worst atrocity crimes, or is it just an exercise in diplomatic window-dressing? Does R2P have the capacity to instigate action that will prevent mass atrocities? Only time and experience will answer these questions. However, it is important within the scope of R2P and prevention to be realistic about the pace of progress and the capacity of the international community to prevent these crimes from occurring.⁹

Measuring progress will be challenging as it is difficult to evaluate, with certainty, a successful intervention for prevention if a crime is not committed. However, in instances where quick intervention prevents further descent into violent crimes, such as in the post-election violence in Kenya in 2008, it is possible to see measurable impact of early warning and early response. R2P does not signal an immediate end to mass atrocity crimes, but it is a conceptual advance in the stated intent of the international community to protect vulnerable populations from the most serious international crimes. Work towards the prevention of those crimes should be ongoing and unrelenting, and R2P gives the international community much needed momentum and leverage to continue this effort.

Understanding early warning

What is early warning for protection?

Early warning for protection is essentially about communicating the right information and analysis to the right people at the right time, enabling them to make the right decisions, prevent violence and protect themselves or others from the worst effects. Early warning systems and mechanisms are being increasingly harnessed to protect people from a range of violent threats and hazards. The manifestations of such systems for conflict and atrocity early warning are, for the most part, still in formative stages and are diverse. Conference participants heard presentations on the need to develop regional mechanisms for the prevention of minority conflicts;¹⁰ online systems using crowd sourced mapping technologies;¹¹ localised systems in which early warning triggers conflict mediation and monitoring responses at the local level;¹² and ways communities can be informed about threats through informal networks established by health workers.¹³

In addition to formalised structural early warning mechanisms, it is important to note that there are many organic forms of early warning that have existed in communities for centuries and continue to be used in many circumstances. These organic systems are the informal communication networks within and between communities that prepare and inform those communities about events and incidents that may affect them. These are people-to-people, church-to-church, and sometimes local organisation-to-local organisation types of communication that occur on a daily basis. It is not uncommon for these early warning systems to be better informed and more reliable than international and structural early warning systems that are often remotely managed.

Despite this diversity, early warning mechanisms and systems do share some common underpinnings. Lawrence Woocher, Senior Program Officer at the United States Institute of Peace's Center for Conflict Analysis and Prevention, identified four elements to early warning, which could be applied equally to formalised early warning mechanisms or to the more organic and informal mechanisms.

First, early warning requires the collection, analysis and communication of information. Second, information should be gathered when there are signs of escalating violence and risk. In relation to R2P this is especially relevant when, third, events can be seen to lead to genocide, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity or war crimes. These situations may be different to those that lead to violent conflict, and consequently should be viewed differently and may require different response mechanisms to be in place. Fourth, and possibly most importantly, early warning must be provided far enough in advance to take timely and effective preventive measures.

Challenges for effective early warning

Transforming effective early warning into effective and timely protective action is a complicated process. It requires the right information at the right time, a mechanism for that information to be analysed and to flow to the right people and for the right people to make the right decisions. This may be communicating upwards to policy- and decision-makers, horizontally between actors in the field, or downwards to communities at risk. As such there are a number of points at which early warning systems or mechanisms can break down.

The right information and analysis: for what purpose?

Woocher suggested that one of the main challenges for early warning systems is not a lack of information, but rather an abundance of information about the "complex phenomena" combined with "limited knowledge" about what the information means. For example, accurately predicting whether the marginalisation of particular groups in a society will transform into patterns of systematic violence requires accurate data, highly sophisticated contextual analysis, and even still may remain more an art than a science.

Patrick Meier, Director of Crisis Mapping Ushahidi, focused on the role of technology in facilitating community and grassroots actors to communicate signs of impending violence. Meier noted that traditionally early warning specialists have been preoccupied with conflict prediction at the expense of establishing mechanisms that enhance local capacity to warn and be warned. For Meier, the



Mr Lawrence Woocher. Photo: Ben Murphy/OxfamAUS.

focus should be on equipping communities that are broadly at risk of these crimes with the tools to efficiently and effectively share what is the right information for them. An early warning system that gathers information from the crowd including journalists, official sources and communities themselves (crowdsourced information) and provides the information in real time and in an easily digestible format may be more effective at assisting communities to prepare for and prevent violence than prediction mechanisms. Nevertheless, technology should be but one component of any system and is not a panacea to the difficulties and problems that early warning systems have in obtaining, understanding and communicating the right information.

The right time: temporal constraints

Deciding when to warn requires a delicate balance. “Over-warning” can lead to neglected alerts, whereas “under-warning” can lead to surprise and a lack of preventive or preparatory action. There can also be a temporal conflict between the concept of *early* warning, and the idea that R2P can only be invoked when states are manifestly failing to protect their citizens. However, as we have noted, R2P is enduring and requires responses at many

different levels not only when situations reach crisis point. For example, we know from the history of atrocities that the scapegoating of populations, the use of hate speech and inciting propaganda against targeted ethnic, religious or other groups is a cause for alarm with respect to the potential for the commission of R2P crimes. To maintain integrity, early warning must be communicated at times when there are such clear signs.

Of course this is no easy task. Many of the indicators for the onset of genocide, as identified by the Office of the Special Advisor for the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG), may occur long before there is a real and imminent risk.¹⁴ For example, some of the “structural risk factors” such as state-led discrimination, exclusionary ideology, eradication of diversity in security apparatus and an ethnically polarised elite may all be present and represent a real long-term danger although not an immediate threat.

Imminent warning signs identified by Woocher in his paper include violence and human rights violations targeting civilians of identifiable groups; evidence of organisation/preparation and mobilisation for mass violence; denial of any problems and resistance to international engagement; and an environment of impunity for perpetrators. In these cases international preventive action may appear to be more reasonable, and a real and imminent risk may be present with respect to R2P crimes. However, for the broader purposes of prevention promoted by R2P — particularly in relation to upholding Pillar one and Pillar two responsibilities — a longer-term view of risk and early warning should be taken. This would enable the devising strategies to address long-term structural risk factors long before a crisis is imminently forewarned.

Although many NGOs may not be vocal advocates of R2P,¹⁵ much of the work they do to address long-term structural risks in conflict mitigation, protection and peace-building projects, as well as the rights-based approach to development and protection, will work towards the prevention of R2P crimes in the long term. The point at which such interventions should be designed for the prevention of mass atrocity crimes is a subject for further research and discussion. Meanwhile, it is vital that NGOs

and civil society working in communities where there is deep-seated structural discrimination are aware that these are often precursors to R2P crimes and program accordingly. Enhanced development and dissemination of guidance and lessons learned around best practice programming for NGOs working in communities with chronic, historic and/or structural discrimination would be useful in this regard.

In many ways, one of the greatest challenges for the prevention of mass atrocity crimes, in particular genocide, is the effective management of diversity.¹⁶ One of the primary preconditions for genocide is when there are cleavages in society between powerful and marginalised or excluded groups that are discriminated against. Preconditions may exist well before or in the absence of imminent threat, and it is often in this situation that the issue of sovereignty is raised as a barrier to international action.¹⁷ However, it is at this point that prevention will be most effective.

Francis Deng, UN Special Advisor to the Secretary General on the Prevention of Genocide, asserted that states must earn their sovereignty by living up to certain standards in the responsible protection of their citizens.¹⁸ This idea of “sovereignty as responsibility”¹⁹ underpins R2P, but also acts as an entry point for discussion with states facing difficulties in their communities. Improved recognition of the difficulties of managing diversity effectively can assist states to work towards fulfilling their Responsibility to Protect all communities and peoples within their jurisdiction.

Warning the right people

The right people in this context are those who have the responsibility and/or the capacity to protect. It is tempting to focus on the role of the United Nations in triggering early response when warning has sounded. However, conference participants were cautioned several times not to use the UN as the sole depository for information, and not to expect the UN to be the answer to all impending crises as expectations far exceed capacity. Within that context there is a need to look much closer to the source of the problem, and those assuming the responsibility to

protect. The UN is a membership of states and there is much work to be done directly with states to ensure that they fulfil their responsibility to protect.²⁰

At the same time, the upwards trajectory of most traditional early warning systems can often miss out on warning the very people that are meant to be protected. Presenters such as Casey Barrs from the Cuny Centre, Louise Searle, Senior Advisor for Humanitarian Protection, World Vision Australia, and others focusing on community self-protection and humanitarian protection reminded participants that powerful decision-makers are not the only people capable of protecting those who are vulnerable. Early warning systems may be most effective when they are part of a concerted approach to supporting communities as agents in their own protection, that is, giving communities the information they need to make informed decisions about how to prepare for and protect themselves from the worst threats.

The right decisions: warning-response nexus

Finally, Woocher reflected on what he called the “warning-response nexus” challenge; that is, the gap between early warning provided by analysts and effective early response by decision-makers. Closing this gap requires effective communication between analysts and decision-makers. However, this communication can be undermined by bureaucratic inefficiencies, political barriers and cognitive issues. Human beings tend to process information and make decisions according to what they believe to be possible, and what they are prepared to pay for up-front when there is uncertainty about the benefits. Political leaders must be prepared to take politically risky action if necessary, potentially with no personal benefit given that success will be seen through the absence of visible failure. Practitioners must learn to understand and work within the political constraints that exist to maximise the impact and potential of any early warning system.

Communicating early warning for protection

Early warning is about communication between communities, between stakeholders working in communities, between governments, between regional organisations, and between those with information and those without.

This section will canvass three types of early warning addressed by the conference. The first is a more traditional form of early warning usually undertaken by an institution or organisation involved in information collection and analysis for the purpose of enabling early responses to emerging crises. The second is also well established but more organic and includes community-based informal mechanisms that have historically provided information between and to communities at risk. The third involves newly emerging systems that use real-time technology-based early warning. These systems are often related to imminent and actual crises and are not necessarily strong on predictive analysis, although they are increasingly developing mechanisms for this.

Institutional approaches

Institutional approaches to early warning tend to be organisationally driven and include methodologies for collecting, collating, analysing and distributing information. Generally speaking, many early warning efforts rely on publicly accessible or open source information, in which case there may be duplication or verification issues regarding events and incidents.²¹ The strength and value of early warning systems depends on effective dialogue and communication, both domestic and regional, and between civil society and official bodies. Traditional systems, while increasingly accessible through the internet, will often provide specialised advice and warning to decision-makers at a policy level. These systems are less responsive to community needs and in many instances do not communicate warnings directly to affected populations but rather try to mitigate violence through political and organisational channels.

A particularly effective example of this type of early warning mechanism is one of the roles played by the International Crisis Group's *Crisis Watch Bulletin* with specific "conflict alerts". The group closely monitors crises around the world — it is credible and influential but works predominantly at an institutional and inter-governmental

level to effect change in policy and approach for the prevention of the escalation of crises.

The use of traditional scientific methods for early warning and prevention of mass atrocity crimes has not been widely explored. However, there are some lessons to learn from the experiences of disaster early warning. Conference participants heard from Malinda Braland of the Pacific Disaster Center (PDC), which was formed in 1995 to "provide applied information research and analysis support for the development of more effective policies, institutions, programs and information products for the disaster management and humanitarian assistance for communities of the Asia Pacific region and beyond".²²

While established for the mitigation of the effects of natural disasters, parallels can be drawn to the prevention of mass atrocity crimes. While the PDC has identified communication between the PDC and those responding to early warning as a major challenge, the PDC has used real-time mapping systems to allow for community access to information and knowledge. The need to notify communities at risk of natural disasters is well accepted, but the concept has not extended well to conflict or atrocity prevention early warning systems. Traditional early warning systems for conflict prevention tend to focus on using early warning to influence decision-makers (in the ICG mode) and much can be learned from the disaster management community in this regard.



Ms Amina Rasul. Photo: Ben Murphy/OxfamAUS.

Community-based warning

The second type of early warning system discussed at the conference was horizontal community-based systems, with varying levels of connectivity with state actors. Most of these systems have evolved out of organic communal information sharing systems and many have been fostered through NGO assistance. These systems are intended to be directly responsive to the needs of communities at-risk.

The Early Warning Early Response (EWER) project run in Timor-Leste by Belun and Columbia University's Centre for International Conflict Resolution provided the conference with an example of a model that integrates early warning and conflict analysis with conflict preparedness and response at the community level. While the system is designed for conflict transformation and prevention at the local level, the project has been developing networks and forums that can distribute alerts and flash reports to a national audience. While working through more traditional networks and mechanisms using long-term data sets to draw insights about situational and social change, the EWER project provides an opportunity to review local mechanisms for early warning and illustrates the importance of developing both the capacity for early warning and mechanisms for early and appropriate response.

It is important to remember that the four R2P crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes are, by their nature, well-organised, systematic and widespread. They are not spontaneous, one-off incidences of violence. As such, communities in which these crimes are being planned are often well placed to identify telling shifts in behaviour, social dynamics and patterns of exclusion that precede the commission of mass atrocity crimes.

The capacity of communities to talk to each other, to know their own risks and limitations, and the ability of civil society and NGOs to tap into and build on these networks, is critical to the success of early warning and early response systems. Much of the work being done in this area is about building dialogue and networks, trust, and people-to-people relationships that are enduring and meaningful.

Trusted local leaders and champions are needed



Ms Maria Marilia di Costa, BELUN. Photo: Ben Murphy/OxfamAUS.

to build networks capable of exchanging sensitive information and facilitating early warning and early response at the community level. Yet, as the Director of the Philippine Council on Islam and Democracy, Amina Rasul, discussed in her presentation on the Mindanao, community leaders may often need assistance forming cohesive networks across communities given the transaction costs of this level of coordination. In Mindanao, the religious leaders, or Ulama, are highly respected and present in every community throughout the region, but have not traditionally been well organised or coordinated. The Philippine Council on Islam and Democracy worked with the Ulama over three years to develop a network that could promote human rights and the peaceful resolution of conflict, as well as the promotion of education and health issues.²³

As these cases suggest, NGOs can enhance community-based early warning for protection by tapping into and fostering community networks, community-based organisations, and community communication mechanisms. Learning lessons from communities about their own communication capacity can also strengthen NGOs' contributions to early warning and early response. It is critical that systems are built on accepted and accessible communications structures and methods, rather than imposed from the outside.

NGOs can also support communication networks that

have dual purposes. By establishing and fostering communication networks for ongoing humanitarian and development programs, it is also possible to use those same networks to communicate early warning messages to prevent mass atrocity crimes. Media and Communications Consultant, Matt Abud, discussed how the Lady Health Workers' Project in Pakistan enables marginalised and remote communities to access health services.²⁴ At the same time, these health workers serve as a link between communities and broader networks, communicating important messages about risks and serving as a focal point for information that provides a picture about the developments and key needs of communities.

This project enables a channel of communication into communities that may otherwise be inaccessible. These word-of-mouth communication methods are especially critical in areas where internet connectivity and access to technology is low, particularly in remote areas. The key lesson here is that early warning does not necessarily require new mechanisms or complex systems, but may be best achieved by working through existing programs and communication networks. With this in mind, the goal may be to train health workers or religious leaders, for example, in conflict and atrocities early warning and analysis, and establish channels for communicating their warnings with others working in local communities as well as to duty-bearers.

In violent crises, communication options may not be as open or as unlimited as they are in natural disasters or ongoing aid programs in countries at peace. The content of some communications may be seen to be in conflict with government policies, different parties to the conflict may use media for their own ends, and humanitarian organisations may be restricted from conveying certain messages given their commitment to humanitarian principles and the need to maintain access to and permission to work with affected populations. Messaging, therefore, can become politically complex. However, robust networks that are planned to withstand communication disruptions can provide an integral avenue for protecting communities at risk.

New technologies for early warning

One of the objectives of the conference was to bring together practitioners from the field (from both national and international organisations) to learn about new technologies and mechanisms for early warning. A part of this process was to explore whether there were opportunities to use new technologies for the prevention of mass atrocity crimes, how technologies may be integrated into more traditional systems, and how they are currently being used.

It was clear from the conference presentations that innovations in online forms of communication are extending the potential of existing early warning approaches. The new early warning systems look very different to more traditional mechanisms of “information in, analysis and policy recommendations out”. The conference focused on systems that foster “many-to-many, peer-to-peer, two-way, real-time information flows”²⁵ and are therefore particularly useful for enhancing the effectiveness of community-based early warning. New technology systems are able to manage and coherently communicate vast data sets of user-generated or crowdsourced information. Through geographic information system (GIS) mapping and refining the information through thematic filters it can be provided to users in ways conducive to rapid analysis, by



Mr Patrick Meier. Photo: Ben Murphy/OxfamAUS.

CeaseFire

CeaseFire is a national public health strategy in Chicago proven to make communities safer.

“CeaseFire relies on outreach workers, faith leaders, and other community leaders to intervene in conflicts, or potential conflicts, and promote alternatives to violence. CeaseFire also involves cooperation with police and it depends heavily on a strong public education campaign to instill in people the message that shootings and violence are not acceptable. Finally, it calls for the strengthening of communities so they have the capacity to exercise informal social control and respond to issues that affect them. Youth outreach and high-risk conflict mediation are, together, perhaps the most vital of the five core components of CeaseFire.

Outreach workers and violence interrupters are streetwise individuals who are familiar with gang life in the communities where CeaseFire is active. Many of them are former gang members and many have spent time in prison, but they are now “on this side of the line” and eager to give back and help young people in their neighborhoods. These individuals use their experience and knowledge of the streets to seek out and build relationships with troubled youths who are susceptible to the violent norms that still exist on the streets.”

Sourced from: www.ceasefirechicago.org/

communities on the ground as well as the international community.²⁶ The information can help enable communities to make informed decisions about how to react in a crisis and for the international community to understand the protection threats as they emerge.

One of the most commonly used map-based mechanisms is the Ushahidi platform. Conference participants heard from Ushahidi’s Director of Crisis Mapping, Patrick Meier, as well as others who have used this platform at the field level. Ushahidi is a tool for “democratising information, increasing transparency and lowering the barriers for individuals to share their stories,” and aims to change the traditional way that information flows.²⁷ The platform is open source and is used in a variety of ways by organisations, digital activists and citizens, including as a mechanism to report information about rights violations and real-time threats during natural disasters and complex emergencies.

The platform has been deployed for specific crises or purposes such as the Haiti crisis map.²⁸ Anyone can make reports about the situation via phone, SMS (short message service) or the internet, although this clearly requires users to have access to these communications. Reports may be triangulated and verified by analysts using a range of other data sources such as twitter and Facebook feeds and media reports.

On the early warning side, the Ushahidi platform provides an alert service so information held on any particular crisis map can be pushed out to registered users in real time, usually via email, SMS, twitter or really simple syndecation (RSS) feeds. Depending on how the platform is deployed, users may be able to choose to receive alerts based on generic information categories (ie security threats, humanitarian response activities etc) or on geographic coordinates, whereby users are notified of any reports in the vicinity of their stated location. In this way Ushahidi provides a mechanism for early warning as well as greater transparency and information for the international community, including humanitarian and state actors.

In some instances, map-based systems such as Ushahidi can be used as part of an ongoing humanitarian or development program aimed at facilitating early protective

responses once warnings are sounded. Two examples of this discussed at the conference were the CeaseFire project responding to violence in communities in Chicago, and the Uwiano project run during the Kenyan referendum. These projects were developed in response to an anticipated or known threat, and functioned accordingly.

New technology-based approaches in their current forms are generally not focused on predicting crises and tracking long-term trends or patterns.³⁰ Rather, they are about tracking immediate events and incidents as crises unfold. These crisis maps can provide valuable real-time information on which to base early responses. However, the immediate and generally short-term focus means these systems are not yet as useful for tracking or analysing structural and longer-term indicators of mass atrocity crimes. Notably, the deployment of the technology is rapidly developing and its analytical utility will no doubt expand over time. Ideally, new technology systems should be complementary to more traditional mechanisms that rely on long-term research and analysis for prediction of trends, events, and crises and provide real-time information to determine whether predictions have been accurate.

Despite obvious advantages of new technology-based systems, there were also some areas of concern raised at the conference and lessons for practitioners to consider. First, using technology-based systems in repressive regimes can be seen as an opportunity in an environment where traditional early warning mechanisms may appear to be too obvious, open and risk-bound to be effective. However, it was noted by all technology specialists at the conference that there is no safe way to communicate online and that no matter what medium is used for providing information — Facebook, Twitter, Ushahidi type systems — any information that is provided using mobile or web-based communications can be traced. Encryption and robust risk mitigation are means to make such tracking as difficult as possible, but these methods are not infallible. Clearly this has repercussions for users of technologies and represents some limits to technology-based systems' utility for humanitarian action. Second, some of the crisis mapping technical specialists

Uwiano Platform for Peace

Uwiano Platform for Peace was a SMS-based information gathering and action program designed to ensure that the Kenyan referendum held on 4 August 2010, on a new constitution, was violence free.

The program included online tools and features for tracking, reporting, and retrieving evidence of hate speech, incitement, and other forms of violence instigation in text, images, voice, and video. Incoming messages were placed into one of six categories: informative, threat, positive message, hate speech, coded message, or incitement to violence. Verification was undertaken for issues where authorities needed to become involved, such as incitement to violence.

Monitors were deployed across the country with an emphasis on hotspots and a broad media campaign was undertaken to encourage public involvement.

Further information regarding the program can be found at www.comminit.com/en/node/323372

at the conference acknowledged ethical difficulties in promoting the use of technology that may prove dangerous to users in a repressive regime that tracks digital activity and punishes digital activists. It was noted that there is no code of conduct for crisis mappers and digital activists, and therefore little guidance about how information should be gathered, shared and used in protection-sensitive ways.³¹ Within a humanitarian context there are professional standards for the collection of sensitive material for protection purposes and it is likely that the crisis mapper/digital activism and humanitarian sectors could benefit from more interaction regarding appropriate use of sensitive and personal information.

Third, while humanitarian agencies in the field may seem like logical partners for crisis mapping and digital

early warning projects, this is often not possible. This is particularly so in repressive and non-permissive environments, or where technology-based early warning systems become overtly linked with digital activism. Where humanitarian organisations participate or foster new technology-based systems in these challenging contexts it can be difficult to maintain their neutral and impartial status and appearance. Humanitarian organisations using technology-based early warning systems therefore need to have a clear understanding about why they are participating, what the potential risks of participation may be (both principally and practically) and what the net benefit of participation is once the risks and benefits are weighed.

Fourth, the sheer volume of information, the speed with which it accumulates, and the challenge of verification and analysis is another difficulty arising from the use of new technologies. While information is embraced by technology specialists working in this field and “the more the better” was a common call throughout the conference, it was recognised that in some instances the real-time aspect of the information dissemination may not allow for adequate fact-checking. This challenge can in some ways be addressed by the use of closed or password-protected mapping systems. For example, journalists representing reputable news organisations have contributed to crisis maps through password-protected mechanisms allowing greater weight or emphasis to be placed on that information. This information can then be used to verify the widespread and public crowd-sourcing information that can occur simultaneously.

Finally, several participants noted that the effectiveness of new technology-based approaches is limited in countries where access to technology is not widespread. For example, while countries such as Egypt and Kenya have extensive mobile phone coverage, in Timor-Leste, telephone towers do not reach into the country-side and as such early warning systems cannot rely on mobile communications. In this setting, a Belun style system that integrates early warning and early response at the community level is the best possibility for widespread gathering and dissemination of information.

While communication networks can be destroyed or put



Ms Anahi Ayala Iacucci, Crisis Mappers. Photo: Ben Murphy/OxfamAUS.

out of action in major crises, this is normally after the event and so, in terms of early warning, it is possible to be reasonably confident that technology will function for the purposes of sounding the alarm in the community. In conflict situations, however, it is possible that forms of communication systems reliant on technology may be blocked or shut down. In such instances it is of critical importance that early warning communication systems are complemented by but not reliant on technologies.

It was clear from the conference presentations and dialogue that new technology provides innovative tools that can be enormously powerful in the right context, and thus should be better understood and used by practitioners and organisations working with at-risk communities. Nevertheless, its use comes with risks that must equally be understood and mitigated against. The conference served to introduce the ideas, potential and risks of new technologies to a wide array of actors for whom the idea of crisis mapping for the prevention of mass atrocity crimes was a relatively new concept. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, there was not sufficient work done on the interface between technologies available and their potential, or applicability for different types of programs being run by participants. It would be extremely beneficial for further research to be done on how technologies can be best incorporated into traditional humanitarian and development programs to support the conflict and mass atrocity prevention and preparedness.

Responses to early warning

Regardless of which early warning mechanism is activated, there must be a timely, effective and appropriate response for the system to be effective. Such responses can and should occur at local, national, regional and international levels.

At the international level, responses are guided through diplomatic negotiations between states, and within international organisations such as the UN. At this level states are reminded of their obligations to protect their own populations from human rights violations with or without the threat of international intervention under the R2P principle.

Responding to early warning at this level is often about trust and political will. Very often political institutions will be the slowest to respond because any response to early warning will require utility of political capital.³² Until decision-makers are sure that decisions are based on fact, they are often loath to expend political capital or budgetary resources on responses based on prediction. Very often, when providing information about contexts involving violent conflict, by the time fact substantiates prediction, it is already too late.

A lack of political will is often cited as the reason for international failure in the face of mass atrocities. R2P and international law demand action for the protection of populations from mass atrocity crimes, but political constraints are a reality. It will not always be politically possible for the international community to take concrete and effective steps to force protection. Nevertheless, it is possible to develop and grow a culture and environment of responsible protection and acceptance of the values that will inhibit the commission of mass atrocity crimes. This should in turn contribute to the development of political will and acceptance of the requirement and obligation to act.

Response can also be instigated by pressure at a national or local level. Pressure on decision-makers who are directly or indirectly involved with the identified risk may bring about preventive change without involvement of the international community. In many instances conference participants were told that local dispute resolution was often the most effective form of protection for vulnerable populations.

For international NGOs, and civil society and international organisations, there is much work that needs to be done in this field. How these organisations respond to early warning signs and how they can prevent mass atrocity crimes is an emerging practice. Humanitarian protection programs aimed at reducing threats of violence and supporting communities' resilience to violence are expanding but their capacity to respond and adjust to early warning signals is not well researched or documented. Many organisations undertake program adjustments informally without monitoring their interventions as a response to early warning. Evaluating their effectiveness in the prevention of mass atrocity crimes is therefore difficult and more work needs to be done in this area.

Prevention through protective action

One of the key lessons that emerged through the conference was that well designed humanitarian and development programs working with local communities at risk can have a lasting preventive and protective impact. By working with local populations and communities at risk, NGOs have the capacity not only to be better informed about developments and structural changes that may lead to violence, but they can also provide technical assistance to local communities, thereby enhancing their capacity to either provide, or work towards, their own protection. These structural and organised responses to early warning are then likely to be supported by more traditional organic responses that all communities living under threat of violence may use.

Conference participants heard a presentation on the power of monitoring and dialogue in the maintenance of peace and the prevention of violence between communities in conflict. The paper presented by Gus Miclat, Director of Initiatives for International Dialogue, discussed a monitoring project in Mindanao, the Philippines, based on the power of people-to-people networking. Engagement in peace is multi-layered and multi-pronged, involving grassroots and community-based mechanisms such as Bantay Ceasefire (Ceasefire Watch) in Mindanao, while at the same time facilitating lobbying by the grassroots partners with the principals of the conflict actors. This project provided the conference with a

Bantay Ceasefire project

The Bantay Ceasefire project involves communities at risk in their own protection. The volunteers are unarmed but clearly identified as ceasefire volunteers with vests and mobile phones. As they come from the communities they are monitoring, they can be quick to identify potential conflict between warring parties.

When threats are identified, volunteer monitors send texts to Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID), other volunteers, and contacts within the warring parties and even the media. In 2006, when there was a breach in the ceasefire, IID lobbied extensively, with the help of the local community, to bring about a restoration of the ceasefire. Some important lessons were shared with the conference through this experience:

1. Monitoring should be primarily done by people on the ground, by the victims themselves, by those in communities and by those in the battlefields.
2. Grassroots monitors must be linked to a network of lobbyists, champions, articulators, advocates and communicators who in turn mobilise public opinion and lobby policy makers, authoritative persons and other actors of influence.
3. Tools such as a mobile phone, vest, motorcycle, outposts, posters and billboards are essential as they boost morale of the volunteers and offer a sense of protection and empowerment.
4. Partnership with national and international actors, organisations and the media should be sustained to provide a broader, deeper platform that provides for additional psychological security (for the monitors).
5. Norms, instruments and local and international laws



Mr Augusto Miclat. Photo: Ben Murphy/OxfamAUS.

invoked by the victims are more powerful than when invoked by advocates.

6. The process must be complemented with regular visits of advocates or partners from outside the community.
7. The victims of conflict must lead, evolve and present their agenda/alternative themselves.

Importantly, the project sought to immediately mitigate the conflict as well as address the longer-term root causes of conflict to bring about sustainable peace. A network called the Mindanao Peaceweavers played an important role in developing a civil society agenda involving seven peace networks and steered by four NGO secretariats. These networks have provided opportunities to host exchange programs, develop relationships with other groups and communities, and share experiences with other peoples, victims and stakeholders.

powerful example of how community-based, community-driven work can contribute to protection and to long-term sustainable peace.

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Community preparedness

Community preparedness was a topic much discussed throughout the conference. The need to work with communities and assist them to prepare for the onset of violence was recognised, but controversial. Much of the community preparedness conceptual thinking has disaster risk reduction (DRR) theoretical underpinnings and builds on experience in DRR programming. Community preparedness advocates ask the question: if we are preparing communities to flee from natural disasters and to protect themselves in the face of natural calamity, then why do we not prepare them similarly in the face of human-made disaster, conflict and the onset of violence?

On the one hand, preparing a community for violence can be seen as shifting the protection responsibilities of states onto the communities themselves. R2P and other protection specialists are hesitant to endorse anything that may be seen to remove the emphasis from the requirement for states to uphold their responsibilities and protect communities under their jurisdiction. Some critics of community preparedness also suggest it necessitates a shift of focus away from prevention and is therefore a distraction to the primary purpose of preventing mass atrocity crimes. However, conference participants learned that preparedness can be entirely complementary to prevention and protection and that there is, in fact, a triad of activities — prepare, prevent and protect — that work together, complement each other, and form a foundation to the protection of vulnerable communities from mass atrocity crimes.

Community preparedness is important because, in practice, it is often the case that international humanitarian and development communities are not present or are substantially scaled down by the time mass atrocity crimes are committed. Additionally, often the state is either unable to stop the atrocities or is perpetrating the crimes itself. Consequently, when international NGOs, UN humanitarian agencies and other international representatives have left the field, communities must rely on domestic and local mechanisms for their protection. Careful preparation for such an eventuality can either avoid or mitigate the impact of violence.

Casey Barrs, under the auspices of the Cuny Centre, undertook a significant study of the ways communities protect themselves and prepare for the onset of violence.³⁴ In his study he documented more than 100 tactics and strategies used by community members to protect themselves in violent situations. Among these strategies are mechanisms to avoid abusers and methods to support basic survival through preparedness.

Barrs suggested it is important for international actors and NGOs to become partners in safety, sustenance and services and to address the disconnect between how outsiders and communities at risk perceive protection. He acknowledged that NGOs are already doing much innovative protection work including supporting community policing (camp or village watches and patrols) as just one such example. He suggested that organisations working with communities at risk must develop systematic strategies to assist these communities to be prepared for the worst-case scenario — the onset of conflict, or the commission of violent crimes. In such an event, families may be separated, important papers of ownership and identity lost, food supplies stolen, and homes and crops destroyed. NGOs can support communities to develop contingency plans such as agreeing to meeting places, food stashes that may be hidden along escape routes, and the preparation of an escape kit or bag complete with important family documents.

Advocating for protection and prevention

While civil society, NGOs and international organisations may have an important role to play in supporting the



Photo: Ben Murphy/OxfamAUS.

prevention of mass atrocity crimes, it is ultimately states that are responsible for the protection of their people from violence. Advocacy towards state officials and other protection duty-bearers is therefore an important tool for closing the gap between early warning and early response. This is also an area in which there has been considerable activity within the NGO community.

Advocacy can be direct in the form of dialogue between conflicting state officials, parties, mediators or monitors providing protection to the community, and indirect through the mobilisation of international campaigns to influence and, if necessary, put pressure on leaders. Conference participants heard examples of both.

Direct advocacy, central to humanitarian protection programming, requires advocates to be both credible and influential with their targets. International organisations can often be powerful advocates with protection duty-bearers given their international profile and influence. On the other hand, they may be driven by values perceived as external and inconsistent with local culture and custom. Direct advocacy responses therefore require strong connections and partnerships between local and international actors so that international influence can be combined, where possible, with local legitimacy. At the

international level, direct advocacy in the form of face-to-face meetings, policy briefings and roundtables with key states can play an important role in getting deteriorating situations onto the UN agenda. Again, involvement of local partners and affected community members in such endeavours can be a powerful way of highlighting the human impact and the severity of a situation.³⁵

Both direct and indirect forms of advocacy need to be based on credible research, analysis and accurate and compelling stories from the field. When organisations overstate the severity of a situation they can undermine their own credibility. They can also potentially fuel “early warning fatigue” where states and their citizens become complacent due to an overwhelming abundance of alarm bells being raised. It is therefore important to warn sparingly, accurately and appropriately.

Often direct advocacy alone may be insufficient to motivate states to act. In these circumstances international campaigning aimed at building a regional or international profile to generate public pressure may be necessary to influence the policy agenda. Critical success factors for international campaigns discussed at the conference included having grassroots momentum;

the backing of prominent champions, celebrities and/or survivor advocates; the harnessing of political action in influential supporter states; and an effective communications strategy. Campaigns must also be flexible and able to respond quickly and appropriately to developing situations.

Jason Wojciechowski and Anna MacDonald, as a part of the Advocacy Panel at the conference, shared some key lessons from Oxfam's recent campaigning and online popular mobilisation work. They noted that crises can create opportunities for changing embedded or underlying causes of injustice and inequality. Campaigners need to be ready to harness "crisis-tunity" — those special opportunities for lobbying, press coverage, or influencing policy that are created by crises.

They noted that due to the sensitivities for NGOs in speaking out on particular crisis situations, at times it may not be appropriate or useful to brand activities associated with early warning as this may escalate risks for staff and beneficiaries. Effective campaigns will manage and balance associated risks and mitigate them where possible. Related to this point it is important to value partnerships over ownership — to have strong and enduring partnerships is more effective than to "own" all the activities and events being undertaken. It is critical to keep the immediate network close, develop them, work with them and use them.

Technology is playing an increasing role in the mobilisation of public support for action in response to all manner of crises. For example, in the 2010 Haiti earthquake, Oxfam's use of twitter to rapidly release stories and updates to the public was instrumental in mobilising support for the organisation and for international action in response to the disaster.³⁶ Wojciechowski commented that campaign success should be measured by outcomes and not by online statistics — it is very easy to become distracted by the number of "hits" a campaign page may have. However, if there is no policy or behavioural change, or no action taken, the number of online hits becomes irrelevant.

Wojciechowski noted that it can be useful for NGOs to form partnerships with bloggers and citizen journalists

with similar world views who have existing readership, online networks and constituencies they are capable of mobilising in the event that public pressure is required on a particular situation. Campaigners can play both a facilitative role in linking bloggers and citizen journalists up with leaders and duty-bearers, and they can directly mobilise them where necessary (and through them their networks), to build online momentum and create linkages with mainstream media, policy and decision-makers. Examples include bringing bloggers to international fora such as UN meetings and negotiations where they can write about situations as they unfold and meet with diplomats and decision-makers.

The power of international advocacy and campaigning is unassailable. However, often advocacy can be seen as a one-way communication from community to advocates to decision-makers. However, to be effective, conference participants heard that it is beneficial to develop "360 degree" lines of communication and engagement.

Communities and victims need to share their experience and claim their rights. Advocates need to mobilise support from policy- and decision-makers. But communities can also speak among themselves of their aspirations, work to create dialogue between warring parties, monitor their own crises, develop networks of like-minded groups, and create a groundswell of protection and movement for peace.

The Ulama's role in enhancing understanding, cooperation and peace among communities in Mindanao³⁷ reflects the power of local networks to advocate directly to the community and community leaders to effect change in attitude and behaviour in a way that can be critical to the successful prevention of mass atrocity crimes. International actors, including NGOs, have a vital role to play in providing information and tools to communities so they are empowered to represent their own interests and participate in their own protection. However, these initiatives must be locally driven to be sustainable and appropriate. This area requires further exploration, although there is clearly great potential for local movements to provide lasting change and greater protection.

Matters for further consideration

Several matters for further consideration emerged from the conference. These are areas for further study, or merely issues and difficulties that were identified but which the conference format did not have the scope or the time to resolve. Some of these issues relate to broader humanitarian and development practice; others are specific to the prevention of mass atrocity crimes and are listed below.

1. Conceptual clarity is needed regarding early warning for the prevention of mass atrocity crimes, R2P and protection more broadly. There are instances where NGOs are undertaking activities that may assist in the early warning and prevention of mass atrocities, however, they may not realise that their work could contribute to a wider network of early warning or preventive activity. Often the issue is not so much substantially changing the project that is being undertaken but rather re-examining the lens that is used to shape the language and discussion around the goals, benefits and outcomes of the project. Some lessons learned and guidance notes around work NGOs have done with communities with long-term or structural discrimination issues would help to develop greater understanding and programmatic awareness in this field.
2. Lack of international NGO participation at the conference was disappointing and a result of perhaps several issues. The first is that the prevention of mass atrocity crimes — at least structural prevention — does not fall neatly into either development or emergency/humanitarian practice. Once crimes are committed, emergency practitioners are mobilised, but the longer-term structural shifts between and within communities that indicate a trend towards, for example, genocide, are development issues. It can be difficult to engage both development and humanitarian workers on the same issues given the practical and theoretical divisions between the two areas

(even within multi-mandated agencies themselves). However, greater humanitarian and development convergence around the prevention of mass atrocities is needed to help prevent these crimes and protect vulnerable communities.

It is also likely that international NGO attention to improving practice around the prevention of mass atrocity crimes is tainted by a broader reluctance to engage with the R2P discourse. This is in part because of the political nature of R2P and its association with the idea of humanitarian intervention. R2P is thus seen to be incompatible with the NGO practice of neutrality and impartiality.³⁸ Further exploration into the actual and perceived risks of mass atrocity crime prevention being incorporated into humanitarian and development practice, and ways to build greater momentum in the international NGO community around this critical aim, is warranted.

3. There are untapped opportunities for collaboration between development and humanitarian NGOs and conflict early warning practitioners, particularly those activists who are developing and using new technologies, although such collaboration would not be without risk. The role of digital activists is an important one, and it is possible to see the power of their methodologies through recent events in the Middle East. Some of the issues raised by technology specialists included the need for a code of conduct regarding information and data protection, security of participants, and the implications and impacts of their activities. Some issues can be addressed by existing codes of conduct, particularly the Red Cross Code of Conduct,³⁹ and the principle of “do no harm”, a guiding principle that could be adopted by digital activists. What needs to be clear, however, is that often digital activists do not consciously choose to work within a humanitarian framework or adhere to fundamental principles of neutrality and impartiality,



Dr Edward Luck, Special Advisor to the UN Secretary General.
Photo: Ben Murphy/OxfamAUS.

and so collaboration and partnership between them and humanitarian NGOs should be carefully and thoughtfully constructed.

4. While there has been significant improvement in recent years, the humanitarian community still has much to learn from civil society organisations working to support community self-protection, preparedness and prevention through conflict transformation. Like the disaster management community's move to disaster risk reduction approaches, humanitarians working in conflict zones need to shift towards a preparedness, preventive, and protective approach. There needs to be greater engagement between development and humanitarian practitioners to make this happen. This will be facilitated if donors also recognise the need to institutionalise conflict early warning and preparedness, prevention and protection

approaches as part of realising their obligations relating to R2P and the broader protection of civilians.

The use and integration of new technologies and practices is a challenge for NGOs accustomed to working face-to-face with communities and stakeholders. However, there are significant opportunities presented by the technological advances in telecommunications, online social media and GIS mapping. The integration of technologies into humanitarian and development practices will carry both benefits and risks. It would be beneficial for further work to be done to explore the most effective ways for humanitarian and development practitioners to incorporate some of the new methodologies and technologies into their work to more effectively protect vulnerable communities.

Conclusion

The complexities of early warning for the prevention of mass atrocity crimes became increasingly clear throughout the conference. Equally complicated were the range of options for responding to early warning alarms. While conference participants sought to learn from early warning mechanisms that have been established for the prediction and warning of natural disasters, the nature of mass atrocity crimes, and the political implications of their commission, makes early warning in this arena fraught with difficulty.

In the first instance there are temporal issues around what constitutes early warning. If we seek to analyse structural shifts and behaviours including inter-group relations, records of discrimination and/or human rights violations,⁴⁰ then early warning should be very early and responses may include a range of activities including economic development, social cohesion projects and human rights education. Such activities may be implemented by the state, international NGOs or local civil society and they may occur so early in the cycle of mass atrocity crimes that the crimes may never occur.

Complexities around both vertical and horizontal communication and early warning were a common theme throughout the conference. Vertical approaches tend to be asymmetrical – with emphasis on upward communication flows to assist the international community respond, over feeding information back down to communities. Horizontal mechanisms also have challenges – including ensuring communities have accessibility to participate, that the information is verified and meaningfully assists communities to avoid circumstances that may be a direct risk.

The third set of complexities arose around the need for appropriate responses to early warning. These responses included programs that might prepare communities at risk for the onset of violence; establishing community-based

programs and activities such as peace monitoring, human rights education, and outreach; advocating for change either at the national and international level, or simply at a local level between antagonists; and communicating to and between communities through new technologies or traditional outreach programs.

Common to all the complexities and responses was the need for timely and appropriate information enabling those at risk to be active agents of their own protection. In order to be effective, early warning for the prevention of mass atrocity crimes must have robust and reliable communication mechanisms at all levels. Without them, communities cannot be prepared, local actors cannot be involved in preventive action, the national or international community cannot bring their influence to bear, and the consequences — the commission of mass atrocity crimes — are tragic.

The Responsibility to Protect principle provides a framework for action. It gives the international community a globally agreed principle of mutual responsibility when faced with genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and ethnic cleansing. It is now the responsibility of all involved to improve their understanding of the issues and complexities involved in the prevention of mass atrocity crimes and to work towards more effective responses.

Annex 1:

Speakers and panellists list

Introduction

Mr James Ensor, Director Public Policy and Outreach, Oxfam Australia

Official welcome and opening remarks

HE Dr Nhim Vanda, Senior Minister and First Vice President, National Committee for Disaster Management, Royal Government of Cambodia

Session 1: Grounding in R2P

Dr Edward Luck, UN Special Advisor to the Secretary General – *R2P and the United Nations: early warning and the development of a norm*

Ms Doris Mpoumou, Director, International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect – *R2P and the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect*

Dr Noel Morada, Director, Asia-Pacific Centre for Responsibility to Protect – *R2P in the Asia Pacific*

Session II: Mechanisms for early warning

Keynote Speaker:

Mr Francis Deng, UN Special Advisor to the Secretary General on the Prevention of Genocide

Panellists:

Mr Lawrence Woocher, Senior Program Officer, Center for Conflict Analysis and Prevention, United States Institute of Peace – *Conceptualizing Early Warning: Core Tasks*

Ms Maria Marilia Da Costa, Program Manager for EWER Program in BELUN – *The Role of Belun and Columbia University's Centre for International Conflict Resolution's 'Early Warning Early Response' system, in ensuring effective warning and response to conflict risks in Timor-Leste*

Ms Malinda Braland, Pacific Disaster Center – *DisasterAWARE – Decision Support Application for Disaster Early Warning and Response*

Dr Stefanie Elies, Director, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Office for Regional Cooperation in Asia and Ms Ratna Mathai Luke, Project Officer, Asia–Europe Foundation – *A Framework Document on Early Warning in Minority Conflicts*

Session III: New technologies for early warning

Keynote Speaker:

Mr Patrick Meier, Director of Crisis Mapping Ushahidi – *Exploring the Potential of New Technologies in Conflict Early Warning*

Panellists:

Ambassador Daniel Stauffacher, Chairman, ICT4Peace – *Human and Organisational Factors in ICTs for Crisis Information Management*

Ms Anahi Ayali Iacucci, Crisis Mappers – *New Technologies and Early Warning systems in Non-Permissive Environments*

Session IV: Community preparedness and protection

Keynote Speaker:

Mr Casey Barrs, The Cuny Centre – *Working with Communities and Preparing for Violence*

Panellists:

Ms Louise Searle, Senior Advisor for Humanitarian Protection, World Vision Australia – *Strengthening protection for individuals and communities at risk of, or experiencing atrocity crimes and violations: Humanitarian Protection action in DRC and reflections on the relevance and utility of applying the R2P concept in practice*

Dr Daniel Franks, Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining, Sustainable Minerals Institute, The University of Queensland – *Extractive resources and mass atrocity crimes: Is there a link?*

Ms Amina Rasul, Director, Philippine Council on Islam and Democracy – *Peace in Mindanao – Empowering the Ulama*

Session V: The role of advocacy in the prevention of atrocity crimes

Panellists:

Ms Anna MacDonald and Mr Jason Wojciechowski, Oxfam International – *Humanitarian Advocacy and Campaigning*

Mr Augusto Miclat, Executive Director, Initiatives for International Dialogue – *Humanitarian Communications and Lessons in Monitoring and Protection*

Mr Matt Abud, Media and Communications Consultant – *Lessons from Communicating in Disasters: Learning to Listen*

Session VI: Conference wrap up and closing remarks

Dr Edward Luck, Special Advisor to the UN Secretary General

Endnotes

- 1 Outcome Document: *NGOs and the Prevention of Mass Atrocity Crimes: a practical workshop for NGOs* (Oxfam 2009). See www.oxfam.org.au/site-media/pdf/OAus-NGOsAndPreventionOfAtrocityCrimes.pdf
- 2 *World Summit Outcome Document* General Assembly Resolution UN GAOR, 60th sess, Agenda items 46 and 120, UN Doc A/Res.60/1 (2005).para 138
- 3 Ibid, para 139.
- 4 Pillar one: the protection responsibilities of the state. Pillar two: international assistance and capacity-building to help states to fulfil their responsibilities under Pillar one. Pillar three: timely and decisive response to a state's manifest failure to protect its population from the four atrocity crimes. See Report of the UN Secretary General, *Implementing the Responsibility to Protect*, January 2009, A/63/677.
- 5 See Hugo Slim and Andrew Bonwick, *Protection: ALNAP Guide for Humanitarian Agencies*, ODI, 2005, p91.
- 6 Dr Edward Luck — concluding comments at the *Early Warning for Protection* conference
- 7 Dr Edward Luck — concluding comments at the *Early Warning for Protection* conference
- 8 See Dr Alex J. Bellamy, "Mass Atrocities and Armed Conflict: Links, Distinctions, and Implications for the Responsibility to Prevent", Policy Analysis Brief, The Stanley Foundation, January 2011 (www.stanleyfoundation.org/publications/pab/BellamyPAB22011.pdf)
- 9 Since the conference and the development of this paper, historic events have unfolded in unprecedented UN Security Council action for the protection of civilians in armed conflict in Libya. The impact this intervention will have on the development of the R2P principle will be interesting to follow.
- 10 Ratna Mathai-Luke and Dr Stephanie Elies: *A Framework Document on Early Warning in Minority Conflicts*
- 11 Anahi Ayala Iacucci: *New technologies and early warning systems in non-permissive environments*
- 12 Maria Marilia Da Costa, *The role of Belun and Columbia University's Centre for International Conflict Resolution's Early Warning Early Response system, in ensuring effective warning and response to conflict risks in Timor-Leste*, and Augusto Miclat, *Humanitarian Communications and Lessons in Monitoring and Protection*
- 13 Matt Abud, *Lessons from Communicating in Disasters: Learning to Listen*
- 14 OSAPG, *Analysis Framework for the Prevention of Genocide* www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/adviser/pdf/osapg_analysis_framework.pdf
- 15 Outcome Document: *NGOs and the Prevention of Mass Atrocity Crimes: a practical workshop for NGOs* (Oxfam 2009). See www.oxfam.org.au/site-media/pdf/OAus-NGOsAndPreventionOfAtrocityCrimes.pdf
- 16 Francis Deng, in conference presentation
- 17 Francis Deng, in conference presentation
- 18 Francis Deng, in conference presentation
- 19 Donald Rothchild, Francis M. Deng, I. William Zartman, Sadikiel Kimaro and Terrence Lyons, *Sovereignty as Responsibility: Conflict Management in Africa*, Brookings Institution Press 1996
- 20 Dr Edward Luck, in conference presentation
- 21 Ratna Mathai-Luke and Dr Stephanie Elies: *A Framework Document on Early Warning in Minority Conflicts*
- 22 Malinda Braland, Pacific Disaster Center: *DisasterAWARE – Decision Support Application for Disaster Early Warning and Response*
- 23 Amina Rasul, *Peace in Mindanao – Empowering the Ulama*
- 24 Matt Abud, *Lessons from Communicating in Disasters: Learning to Listen*
- 25 Patrick Meier, *Exploring the Potential of New Technologies in Conflict Early Warning*
- 26 For a basic example of how online crowd-sourcing works see Ushahidi blog: <http://blog.ushahidi.com/index.php/2009/05/01/eriks-ted-talk-on-ushahidi/>
- 27 See Ushahidi website: www.ushahidi.com/about-us
- 28 See a map of deployments of the Ushahidi platform around the world: <http://community.ushahidi.com/deployments/>
- 29 See www.ceasefirechicago.org/five_core_components.shtml

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- 30 Technology-based mapping systems are increasingly being modified to provide long-term mapping of trends, therefore allowing for situational analysis. This is a developing practice and was not explored at the conference.
- 31 Interestingly, following the conference there is a newly established Standby Task Force of crisis mappers has developed a code of conduct for contributing volunteers. This code of conduct is based on the Code of Conduct of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief.
See <http://blog.standbytaskforce.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/TF-Code-of-Conduct.pdf>.
- 32 Ratna Mathai-Luke and Dr Stephanie Elies: *A Framework Document on Early Warning in Minority Conflicts*
- 33 Augusto Miclat, *Humanitarian Communications and Lessons in Monitoring and Protection*
- 34 Casey Barrs, *Working with communities, and preparing for violence*
- 35 Anna MacDonald, *Humanitarian Advocacy and Campaigning*
- 36 Anna MacDonald, *Humanitarian Advocacy and Campaigning*
- 37 Amina Rasul, *Peace in Mindanao: Empowering the Ulama*
- 38 Outcome Document: *NGOs and the Prevention of Mass Atrocity Crimes: a practical workshop for NGOs* (Oxfam Australia 2009). See www.oxfam.org.au/site-media/pdf/OAus-NGOsAndPreventionOfAtrocityCrimes.pdf
- 39 See www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/disasters/code-of-conduct/code-english.pdf
- 40 OSAPG, *Analysis Framework for the Prevention of Genocide*
www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/adviser/pdf/osapg_analysis_framework.pdf



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