



How to Prevent Mass Atrocities

Chatham House, London

20 February 2018

Adama Dieng, Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide, UN Secretary-General

Matthew Rycroft CBE, Permanent Secretary, Department for International Development; UK Permanent Representative, United Nations (2014-18)

Dr Kate Ferguson, Director of Research and Policy, Protection Approaches

Champa Patel (Chair), Head, Asia Programme, Chatham House

On 20 February 2018, Protection Approaches led an evening event at The Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House, and brought together the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, UN Under Secretary-General Adama Dieng, the new Permanent Secretary of the Department for International Development and UK's former Ambassador to the United Nations, Matthew Rycroft, and Director of Research and Policy at Protection Approaches, Dr Kate Ferguson. The panel, chaired by Champa Patel, Head of the Asia Programme at Chatham House, examined limitations of current global strategies of prevention and discussed ways in which the UK might integrate its commitments to the agenda within its own national policies and mechanisms.

Adama Dieng discussed 'how and why we fail' to prevent mass atrocities, especially when the warning signs are so often clear. Mr Dieng highlighted the example of Myanmar, noting that the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide had warned about risks facing the Rohingya in Rakhine State already in 2010. Discussing the international systems in place to prevent such atrocities, Mr Dieng recommended that the commitments set out in the Responsibility to Protect principle be institutionalised within national mechanisms and applied to the domestic sphere as well as foreign and development policies.

Matthew Rycroft, speaking just three weeks into his new role as Permanent Secretary, spoke to the need for a holistic approach to mass atrocity prevention in which many actors, with different instruments should play a role. Mr Rycroft emphasised 'we know that prevention works, prevention works in terms of saving lives above all it also works of course in terms of saving money, and all of us from our different walks of life can get involved in it, and the more inclusive we can be the better.' He went on to outline two challenges for prevention approaches to overcome; first, the challenge in 'proving prevention works', and second, the challenges in pressing for action through the UN Security Council.

Dr Kate Ferguson was clear to point out that atrocity prevention is not and should not be considered a narrow policy agenda but rather a shared, global challenge that impacts national interests as well as international stability and security. She argued that prevention has not yet been whole-heartedly pursued but that current approaches are clearly failing. She recommended the UK Government respond to the recommendations of the Foreign Affairs and International Development Select Committee inquiries into UK policy in Myanmar and prioritise the development of a national strategy on atrocity prediction and prevention. A joint FCO-DfID analysis unit, resourcing the R2P focal point, and providing ministerial oversight were some of the possible options Dr Ferguson put forward.

Questions and comments from the audience centred around further discussions on the role of the Security Council, the importance of SDG16, and whether it provides an effective and practical framework for mass atrocity prevention and the current usefulness and scope of R2P in prevention of mass atrocity crimes.