

Prevention of genocide and mass atrocities in the Western Balkans: a united step forward

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“The prevention of atrocity crimes requires robust engagement from civil society. Uniting your efforts now is the key to progress.”

Adama Dieng, UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide

Over two decades have passed since the conflict in the Western Balkans began, which followed the dissolution of Yugoslavia. The end of the conflict, which caused the greatest human suffering in Europe since World War II, came with a promise of change, mainly through economic integration within the European Union (Impunity Watch, 2018). Today, the countries of the Western Balkan Region (WBR) are parliamentary democracies, but they are also fragile states. Tensions between different ethnic, cultural, and religious groups, if unaddressed, pose a threat to stability and peace of the region.

To contribute to further development of the region and foster an environment where human rights are respected and the principles of transparency, rule of law, and non-recurrence are upheld, the WBR built its first coalition for the prevention of genocide and mass atrocities. The **Western Balkans Coalition for Genocide Prevention (WB_CGP)** was created by The Post-Conflict Research Center (PCRC), a Sarajevo-based non-governmental organization dedicated to restoring a culture of peace in the Western Balkans, and the United Nations Office for Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect (UNOGPRP), under the patronage of Adama Dieng, United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide.

Since 2011, PCRC and UNOGPRP have worked together to design and deliver a series of seminars and trainings for non-governmental (NGO) and civil society organization (CSO) representatives from the Western Balkans working in the fields of transitional justice, human rights, law, youth education, media, and peacebuilding. The overall goals of the trainings were to increase the participating organizations' capacity to prevent, identify, and respond to genocide and mass atrocity crimes. Trainees were educated on the causes and dynamics of genocide and violent conflict, how to recognize early warning signs, as well as what policies and strategies exist for prevention. The trainings focused on educating participants on response strategies, how to report conditions on the ground to the appropriate actors, how to organize local communities to counter inter-ethnic turmoil, and how to use social media and other technologies in their efforts to prevent violent conflict.

After training over **120 representatives from 82 organizations**, the overall strategy of the program was shifted to create a regional coalition with an aim to give rise to new processes and joint initiatives for tackling discrimination, hate speech, genocide denial, judicial and media reform, the prevention of violent extremism, dealing with the past and historical memory, and other important issues that contribute to region's overall stability. Thus, under the initiative of PCRC and UNOGPRP, the WB_CGP was officially established in 2017 and currently consists of **30 of the region's leading CSOs and NGOs** from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Croatia, and Kosovo. By incorporating the ethos of the United Nation's Responsibility to Protect and Sustainable Development Goals, PCRC and UNOGPRP also intend to further educate coalition members on effective communications methods for interacting with host governments and other relevant political, social, educational, and media institutions in order to raise awareness of problems and catalyse positive change.