



Preventing incitement: Policy options for action

Conceptual framework

The following policy recommendations were developed with the aim of assisting States and the international community to protect populations by preventing atrocity crimes, namely genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

The Member States of the United Nations have acknowledged that they have the primary responsibility to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.¹ This responsibility entails the prevention of these crimes, including their incitement, through appropriate and necessary means, and is consistent with existing obligations under international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law.

The international community has a parallel responsibility to encourage and assist States to fulfil their responsibilities towards their populations. The policy options presented here are aimed specifically at preventing incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes. They should be placed in the broader context of the structural and operational measures that States and the international community can take to protect populations from these crimes, which are set out in the reports of the Secretary-General on the responsibility to protect.

Policy options for States

1. States should take steps to build resilience to incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes and prepare contingency plans for the prevention of incitement to such violence. Building resilience entails, inter alia, building State institutions and structures that are legitimate, respect international human rights law and the rule of law in general and have the capacity to address and defuse sources of tension; and building societies that accept and value diversity and in which different communities coexist peacefully. Contingency planning aims to prepare governments, civil society and populations to minimise the impact of incitement and respond adequately to any crisis resulting from acts of incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes. It also means making decisions in advance about the management of human and financial resources, coordination and communications procedures and content, and being aware of a range of technical and logistical responses.

¹ World Summit Outcome document, paragraphs 138 and 139, General Assembly resolution 60/1.

2. States should assess both the vulnerability and the resilience of different population groups vis-à-vis incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes. In this context, they should establish community outreach programmes to understand better the roles of various stakeholders in preventing or responding to incitement.
3. States should implement measures that challenge stereotypes, foster social solidarity and the inclusivity of marginalised and discriminated groups. In this context, States should institute an education system that develops attitudes and behaviours necessary to counter hatred and prejudice. The education system should reflect the ethnic, racial and cultural diversity of each State, be inclusive in its policies, prescribe unbiased schoolbooks, promote the teaching of classes that include the history and positive contribution of minorities, their cultures, languages and traditions and ensure that teachers are trained to promote diversity, inclusion and acceptance. States should also incorporate modules on preventing and responding to atrocity crimes in their education system, including modules on how to prevent and to resist incitement.
4. States should promote the self-regulation of political parties. “Self regulation” is intended in this context to refer to the capacity of political parties to influence their own members, encouraging tolerance and respect for diversity as well as fostering the use of positive speech and the avoidance of discriminatory language. Political parties should take robust disciplinary measures against those members of political parties who promote incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes, where the threshold of illegality has yet to be reached.
5. States have a responsibility to counter hate speech with positive messages of inclusivity. States should also encourage the use of positive and alternative speech as a way to prevent and respond to incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes. This could include, inter alia, the public rejection of hate speech by political, religious and community leaders and the provision of objective and accurate information about events as an antidote to rumours.
6. States should promote media pluralism, including the right of national, racial, religious and ethnic minorities to freely access and use media, information and communications technologies for the production and circulation of their own content, as well as for the reception of content produced by others.
7. States should create a legal and social environment that will encourage freedom of the press, independent regulation of media content and ethical standards across all platforms of journalism.
8. Promoting a diversity of voices and conversations on the Internet, including through social media, is crucial to prevent incitement to violence that could lead to atrocities. States should adopt effective and concrete policies and strategies to make the Internet widely available, accessible and affordable to all to counter the dissemination of ideas based on racial and ethnic superiority or hatred; to promote equality, non discrimination and diversity, to foster mutual understanding and build a culture of peace.

9. States should ensure that minority rights are respected and that diversity is not only tolerated but understood as a positive value and as contributing to the richness of societies. In this context, States should safeguard the historic memory of all population groups, including minorities, including by developing and protecting national archives, in particular in those countries that have experienced atrocity crimes.
10. As extremism is more likely to thrive in situations of widespread corruption and extremism is a main root cause of incitement to mass violence, States should fight corruption as a measure to curb extremism and enhance trust in national institutions and norms.
11. Enforcing laws and ensuring accountability for acts of incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes are important components of atrocity crimes prevention. To this end, it is important that States ensure that incitement to violence is a punishable offense and that those responsible are prosecuted. However, States should ensure that any laws criminalizing incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes do not unduly limit the right to freedom of expression and opinion².
12. States should identify and repeal any national legislation that discriminates against any community based on its identity. States should adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation that includes preventive and punitive action to effectively combat incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes, such as discriminatory legislation.
13. Furthermore, States that have blasphemy laws should repeal these laws, as they have a stifling impact on the enjoyment of freedom of religion or belief and healthy dialogue and debate about religion.
14. States should include modules on preventing incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes in the training curricula of its officials, including law enforcement officials and the judiciary.
15. States should encourage law enforcement officials and the judiciary to collect and analyse data on any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that could constitute incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence in order to have an ongoing assessment of their prevalence as well as of the actions that could be taken to address them.
16. States should assess and address the root causes of poverty and inequality, given that these are drivers of inter-group tensions, as a long-term strategy to prevent atrocity crimes, including their incitement.

Policy options for regional, sub-regional and other intergovernmental organisations

17. Regional and sub-regional organisations should develop strategies to deal with incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes.

² See paragraphs 18 and 22 of the Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/adviser/pdf/Rabat_draft_outcome.pdf.

18. Regional, sub-regional and other intergovernmental organisations should encourage dialogue about pluralism and inclusivity as a means to prevent incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes. They should also assume moral leadership and speak out when States fail to prevent incitement.
19. The Inter-Parliamentary Union should support national and regional initiatives that address the role of political leaders in preventing and curbing incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes, particularly in emerging democracies and countries undergoing a political transition.
20. The international community, including regional and sub-regional organisations, should help disseminate guidance on how to prevent and respond to incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes at the national and regional levels.
21. The Human Rights Council should promote efforts to prevent incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights could provide guidance to the Human Rights Council on how to do so, drawing on the Rabat Plan of Action.

Policy options for civil society, including the media

22. Civil society organisations should monitor data on any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence and, in particular, hate speech that could constitute incitement to atrocity crimes.
23. Civil society organisations should implement projects and programmes, including through the media, which challenge stereotypes and foster social solidarity, especially vis-à-vis groups that are victims of marginalisation and discrimination.
24. Given their capacity to influence, religious leaders have a special role to play. They should encourage and facilitate inter-faith dialogue, including with groups that are not part of the mainstream, where they determine this to be appropriate.
25. Ethical practices by journalists and good corporate governance by the media can play an important role, both in preventing widespread dissemination of any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence that could lead to atrocity crimes and in depriving such speech of its power by providing accurate facts and analysis and a forum for countering incitement. The media's responsibility to show humanity (that is, to do no harm) and to be accountable is critical to building public confidence.
26. The media should enhance ethical standards and establish credible structures for internal self-regulation that will promote the principles of truth telling, impartiality and independent reporting.

27. Media organisations should train journalists in research and investigative techniques, including data mapping, and the use of international journalist networks (across all platforms of media, including broadcasting, print and online services) to confirm or validate information in situations where mass violence is imminent, as well as the use of positive and alternative speech to counter incitement to atrocity crimes.
28. The media should engage in efforts to map incidents of incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes as well as best practices related to preventing incitement from leading to atrocity crimes.
29. The media should transfer the ethical standards of traditional journalism to all parts of the new information landscape.
30. The Internet has unlocked unprecedented communication opportunities. However, it has also provided the infrastructure for the dissemination of racial and ethnic hatred, as well as incitement to and mobilisation of racial and ethnic violence. The media, and other institutions, including human rights institutions, should increase awareness of the problem of incitement through the Internet and help design context relevant solutions, including the effective monitoring and moderation of user generated content.

Policy options for the United Nations

31. The United Nations should support the efforts of States to build resilience to incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes and to develop contingency plans for the prevention of incitement to violence.
32. The United Nations should itself develop a contingency plan to respond to situations where there is a risk of incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes, or instances of incitement are reported. Plans should be based on an inter-sectorial approach and include all United Nations departments and agencies that have a role to play in the prevention of atrocity crimes.
33. The United Nations should monitor and share information on incidents of incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes, both internally and with non-United Nations stakeholders, with the aim of improving the prevention of and response to situations of incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes.
34. The United Nations and other international stakeholders should develop case studies on situations where initiatives have been taken by different actors to prevent incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes or limit its impact, with the purpose of identifying best practices and lessons learned.
35. The Office on Genocide Prevention and Responsibility to Protect should support the establishment within the United Nations of focal points on the prevention of incitement to

atrocities crimes, through the United Nations “Contact Group” on the responsibility to protect. The focal points would facilitate information sharing on incidents of incitement to atrocities crimes and coordinate integrated preventive action and response within the United Nations system.

36. The Office on Genocide Prevention and Responsibility to Protect, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation should include modules on preventing and responding to incitement to violence that could lead to atrocities crimes in their respective capacity-building programmes.
37. The Office on Genocide Prevention and Responsibility to Protect should present these policy options for the prevention of incitement to the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly of the United Nations.
38. The Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and the High Commissioner for Human Rights could ask the United Nations Secretary-General to brief the Security Council on situations in which there is a significant risk of incitement to violence that could lead to atrocities crimes or in which such incitement has occurred.
39. The Office on Genocide Prevention and Responsibility to Protect and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights should develop joint initiatives to support the implementation of Human Rights Council resolution 16/18 on "Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatisation of, and discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against, persons based on religion or belief".
40. As part of the accreditation and review process for national human rights institutions, the Sub-Committee on Accreditation of the International Coordinating Committee for National Human Rights Institutions could ask these institutions whether they have taken any measures to prevent and curb incitement to atrocities crimes. Moreover, in the context of its support to national human rights institutions, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights should assist national human rights institutions to develop their capacities to monitor incitement to violence that could lead to atrocities crimes.
41. In the context of their engagement with States, regional organisations and civil society, the Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect and the High Commissioner for Human Rights should raise awareness about the risks entailed in not preventing or responding to incitement to violence that could lead to atrocities crimes. These risks include massive loss of human life, conflict, divided societies and disruption of socio-economic life. United Nations field presences should also contribute to such awareness raising activities.