**YAZIDI GENOCIDE SURVIVORS’ CONFERENCE 2024**

I’d like to begin by thanking everyone for inviting me and the Lemkin Institute to this important conference. I’d like to express my gratitude to Hope and Farhad for being such dedicated professionals and advocates for human rights, as well as an absolute pleasure to talk to. I also extend my thanks to everyone here for keeping the memory of the Yazidi Genocide alive. If there is one thing I’ve learned in genocide prevention is that the moment we forget is the moment we stop acting, and the moment we stop acting is the moment the they win.”

The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention was founded by Elisa von Joeden-Forgey and Irene Massimino. The Institute originated from the Iraq Project for Genocide Prevention and Accountability, which was founded in 2017 to tackle the need for capacity building in genocide prevention in that country.

Elisa and Irene were invited as members of the International Association of Genocide Scholars, and their work contributed to that association’s resolution on ISIS crimes in 2016, which also influence US House of Representatives Resolution 75 that recognized the crimes perpetrated by ISIS as genocide.

The Institute adopts a people-centered approach to genocide prevention, working from and for the grassroots to prevent these mass-atrocity crimes.

Our latest work includes the ongoing genocides in Africa, Asia, the Balkans, and the Middle East, where we implemented our “10 Patterns of Genocide” and our “11 Principles of Genocide Prevention.”

Why is genocide prevention important?

I now turn to the essential issue of genocide prevention and a very specific question: Why is it important?

The first answer is self-evident: we want humanity to be free from the scourge of this crime. However, there are two less obvious answers. First, we are living in a moment in history where, instead of becoming a memory of a less civilized time, genocide is becoming more and more common. Second, because many of the instruments that we have at our disposal are mainly focused on the punishment rather than the prevention of genocide.

The most important instruments in this regard, the 1948 Genocide Convention and the Rome Statute, require that the situation reaches the extermination stage to be branded as genocide. While the former does mention the obligation of State parties to prevent genocide, it doesn’t include the stages that precede the extermination stage, nor does it classify them as genocide. Instead, these preparatory stages are characterized as other violations of international law, usually gross violations of international human rights law.

Genocide is, first and foremost, a sociological concept. In other words, the existence of this crime as a social phenomenon is independent of its legal definition, which is narrower and more restrictive.

As a result, the concept of genocide has two dimensions: the broader sociological dimension, which is essential to understand the evolution of these processes through, among others, the periodization of its different stages. This dimension plays a vital role in coordinating genocide prevention efforts to prevent it from reaching the extermination stage. We will return to that in a moment. On the other hand, there is the more restrictive legal dimension, which is necessary for initiating legal proceedings against States and individuals. While both dimensions are important in their own right, they cannot interfere with each other. In short, they nurture each other but never exclude one another.

* Periodization of Genocide

Periodization refers to the analysis of how these processes develop over time. It’s essential to understand that genocides aren’t isolated or spontaneous events. Instead, they are complex processes that require a considerable amount of time to develop. Moreover, genocides never start from scratch. This means that the underlying conditions for any genocide exist at all times within our societies. These are important considerations in genocide prevention.

There are different models of periodizations, among which Professor Gregory Stanton’s “Ten Stages of Genocide” deserves a special mention. Today, however, I’d like to introduce another perspective, developed by Argentine sociologist Daniel Feierstein. His model is sociological in nature. This means that the evolution of any genocide is measured by the hegemony of certain social practices at a particular moment in time. For example, if we are in the harassment stage it's because that is the most common social practice. It’s important to mention, however, that reaching a particular stage doesn’t mean that social practices that are characteristic of latter or previous stages don’t exist or have ceased to exist. Instead, it means that they are not – or no longer – hegemonic.

Feierstein’s periodization is divided into six stages: 1) Stigmatization; 2) Harassment; 3) Isolation; 4) Systematic Weakening; 5) Extermination; and 6) Symbolic Enactment.

I don’t know if we will have enough time to go through every stage at this moment, although I’m open to answering any questions you might have. What I do want to emphasize is that the sociological approach to genocide allows us to recover two aspects that were omitted in the legal definition. First, these are intricate processes with different stages that demand specific actions in order to stop them. Second, that the aim of every genocide is the destruction of a shared identity and its reconstruction in line with the perpetrator’s design.