

Genocide Prevention APPG Minutes from Inaugural Meeting – 19th July 2005

Chair: Rt. Hon. Clare Short MP

Vice Chair: John Bercow MP

Vice Chair: Lord Lester QC

Number of Genocide Prevention APPG Members: 125

Attending: Rt. Hon. Clare Short MP, John Bercow MP, Lord Lester QC, Dr. Evan Harris MP, Baroness D'Souza, Lord Jeoff, Lord David Hannay, Louise Ellman MP.

Apologies: Lord Dholakia, Baroness Finlay of Llandaff, Mike Gapes MP, Andrew George MP, Neil Gerrard MP, Sandra Gidley MP, Cheryl Gillan MP, Michael Gove MP, Fabian Hamilton MP, Nick Harvey MP, Lord Haskel, Paul Holmes MP, Kelvin Hopkins MP, Dr. Kim Howells MP, Lord Hylton, Lord Joffe, David Kidney MP, Lord King of West Bromwich, Mark Lazarowicz MP, David Lepper MP, Tony Lloyd MP, Elfyn Llwyd MP, Lord Macdonald, Baroness Masham of Ilton, Chris McCafferty MP, John McDonnell MP, Ann McKechin MP, Rt. Hon. Michael Meacher MP, Baroness Neuberger, Baroness Northover, James Paice MP, Dr. Nick Palmer MP, Rt. Hon. Dawn Primarolo MP, Lord Gwilym Prys-Davies, Andy Reed MP, Rt. Hon. Lord Renton Q.C., Paul Rowen MP, Baroness Royall of Blaisdon, Lord Selkirk of Douglas, Mark Simmonds MP, Marsha Singh MP, Paddy Tipping MP, Jon Trickett, Baroness Uddin, Robert Walter MP, Lord Weatherill, Betty Williams MP and Pete Wishart.

Welcoming Remarks –

Rt. Hon. Clare Short MP welcomed those present for attending, and explained that the purpose of the group:

- To ensure that the United Kingdom does all it can to prevent genocides and crimes against humanity;
- To increase the flow of independent information and analysis to UK Parliamentarians about genocides and crimes against humanity;
- To support Parliamentarians so as to increase the effectiveness of their scrutiny of government;
- To promote understanding of the importance of long term approaches to genocide prevention

Election of Officers –

Rt. Hon. Clare Short MP then initiated the election process and proposed that she would be standing as Chair with John Bercow MP and Lord Lester QC as Vice Chairs. She invited those present through a show of hands to challenge these elections. No objections or challenges were raised. The election of Rt. Hon. Clare Short MP as Chair, John Bercow MP as Vice Chair and Lord Lester QC as Vice Chair was passed unopposed.

Statements from Genocide Survivors –

Rt. Hon Clare Short MP introduced the genocide survivors present who were Holocaust survivor Steven Frank, Rwandan Genocide survivor Beatha Uwazaninka, Bosnian Genocide survivor Kemal Pervanic, and Darfur Genocide Survivor Mustafa Nurrain.

Steven Frank related a story of receiving a Red Cross delivery from Britain while in a concentration camp and its significance, enabling them to appreciate that others were concerned for their welfare. He emphasised the importance of survivors being aware that Parliamentarians were working on genocide prevention.

Beatha Uwazaninka passed on her thanks to the MPs present for forming the Genocide Prevention APPG and related that genocide was not an abstract notion; that people were suffering a similar fate in Darfur today to that which she and her family were subjected in Rwanda.

Kemal Pervanic explained that though subjected to genocide because of his religion and race, he felt it was important to view genocide prevention from the perspective of individuals and communities, rather than accept assumptions that bracketed them as part of a victim population.

Mustafa Nurrain related the story of his treatment in Darfur and his journey to London in 2001. He pointed out that the crisis in Darfur has been going on much longer than is commonly understood. He also urged those present to do further work on the crisis in Darfur due to the pressing needs within the region.

Video Presentation from Aegis Trust –

A short video was shown, setting genocide in the context of its individual victims and questioning why, when the signs indicating its likely incidence are evident, we still do not recognise it or intervene to prevent it. The film finished with a summary of the work of the Aegis Trust.

Presentation from Dr. James Smith, Executive Director of the Aegis Trust –

Dr. Smith explained that the Aegis Trust is a genocide prevention charity based near Nottingham, and that it would be assisting the APPG with research and administration. He went on to set out the aims of the Aegis Trust, its background in the UK Holocaust Centre, the work that Aegis has undertaken in Rwanda, the Aegis Trust's educational work and the Protect Darfur campaign, which it coordinates.

Dr Smith stated that the Aegis Trust records the history of genocide through meaningful museums and memorials in order to facilitate recognition and learning, and to act as a focal point for commemoration. It works to challenge the present through effective education programmes, and to shape the future and impact on public policy by working on issues relating to identity, individual choices and societal values.

Dr Smith conveyed that while genocide is complex, it is more akin to extreme exclusion than extreme conflict. He also related the primary, secondary and tertiary stages of genocide prevention, comprising, identifying the causes of genocide in a particular case and monitoring the crisis, crisis management and the launching of effective campaigns that draw attention to the situation, and putting in place effective policies to end violence, dealing with the aftermath of genocide through rebuilding communities, commemoration and securing justice.

A brief overview was offered as to centres that the Aegis Trust operates in the UK and Rwanda, the campaigns that it runs, the education work it undertakes, the research that it compiles, the publications it produces and the policy work it supports.

The presentation then moved on to the Holocaust Centre, the Aegis Trust's sister organisation, and an outline was given of its parts; the on-site *Museum* and its collections, records of testimonies and publications; the *Memorial Centre*, which is made up of the memorial gardens, sculptures, and a rose garden; the *Education Centre*, which comprises school programmes, conferences and talks from genocide and Holocaust survivors; and finally, the *Training Centre*, which provides instruction on discrimination, racism and genocide for teachers, students, professionals and decision makers in the public and the private sector.

The presentation then lead on to the work that the Aegis Trust undertakes in Rwanda on matters relating to memory, dignity, justice, education and living together.

The role of the Kigali Memorial Centre was covered, including its remit to undertake work relating to preservation and maintenance of the onsite *cemetery* and other *historical sites* relating to the 1994 genocide; management of *memorial sites* both within Kigali and elsewhere; and provision of an *education centre* for those seeking to do work on the genocide.

It was explained that the Aegis Trust also runs a documentation centre which works with survivors to provide testimony, support documentation, support personal needs, provide a voice to survivors and facilitate learning and education.

Aegis also supports the justice process by managing a programme to film the 'Gacaca' or village courts, and archive and document records, written material and testimony. Aegis' work in this regard aims to make justice more accessible to survivors and wider society, creating a historical record of the process of justice.

The presentation then moved on to the Protect Darfur campaign, which is coordinated by the Aegis Trust. Dr. Smith explained that parliamentarians are key stakeholders in this campaign, and that the Aegis Trust makes available research papers and briefings to supplement MPs and Peers understanding of the crisis in Darfur. Dr Smith also discussed the campaign's work with the media, so as to raise public awareness, and close monitoring of the situation in Darfur so that it can provide accurate and up to date information.

Finally, the presentation dealt with the role of the APPG itself, and indicated that the goal of the Genocide Prevention APPG is ultimately to ensure that the United Kingdom does all it can to prevent genocide and crimes against humanity. The group is envisioned to meet this goal in three ways, increasing the flow of independent information and analysis to UK Parliamentarians about genocide and crimes against humanity, supporting Parliamentarians so as to increase the effectiveness of their scrutiny of government, and promoting understanding of the importance of long term approaches to genocide prevention.

General Discussion and Questions –

The Rt. Hon. Clare Short MP then opened up the discussion and invited parliamentarians present to ask questions or make statements. The survivors also added their contributions to these discussions as did Dr. Smith.

One focal point of discussion was the *Responsibility to Protect* agenda, where intervention is acceptable in instances where a Government is unwilling or unable to protect to its citizens. 'The Responsibility to Protect' is likely to feature at United Nations Security Council discussions in September. Generally, parliamentarians were in agreement that such an agenda should be supported and encouraged and that this issue should be revisited in more detail by the group.

Darfur and Rwanda featured in an exchange about African countries providing peace keepers. Parliamentarians were, by and large, supportive of the African Union and its mission in Darfur, particularly as a counterbalance to the perceived unwillingness of countries like the US and UK to commit troops to peacekeeping since the Iraq War.

There was a consensus on the need to organise collective success to counteract our collective failures in reacting to previous instances of genocide or mass violence. It was also understood that one of the best mechanisms with which to identify policy objectives would be to examine instances where collective action failed, particularly in the case of Rwanda.

The failure to act effectively in Rwanda was then examined, with a focus on the role and responsibility of the United Nations and the member governments within the Security Council.

The responsibility of the news media to report on genocide-related issues was also briefly raised, in particular on effective ways with which to keep the Darfur crisis in the news cycle.

Finally the survivors were invited to offer their thoughts on the discussions that had taken place. The points raised included that there was a pressing need for action rather than just discussion, that the standing of the UN has been adversely affected by the failure to avert genocide, that declarations and resolutions were only as useful as the action based on them, that much still needed to be done in this field, and that we must learn the appropriate lessons from past genocides.

Meeting Adjourned –