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A Snapshot of the Anti-Genocide Movement

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As part of my Carl Wilkens Fellowship project, I sought to take a closer look at the burgeoning anti-genocide movement by collecting feedback and insights from various actors within the movement. I administered a qualitative survey through Google Forms which consisted of various open-ended questions. The survey was sent out to the larger Carl Wilkens Fellowship network as well as through Twitter and other social media outlets. Thirteen people completed the survey; many of the respondents work in the nonprofit sector, but others include social workers, a professor, a pharmacy tech, a student, an attorney, and a lobbyist. The majority of the respondents (twelve) considered themselves active in the anti-genocide movement with one person identifying as not active within the movement.

Many people defined the anti-genocide movement as a collection of groups, individuals with varying backgrounds, and organizations (grassroots to government and non-governmental organizations) mobilizing to end mass atrocities. Several people brought up raising awareness and education as important aspects of the movement: “The most important thing the anti-genocide movement does is educate the people so they will never forget.” Other people brought up the importance of “raising political will to end genocide and mass atrocities.”

Everyone has a story about how he or she has made working to end genocide his or her cause, and many of the survey respondents shared their very own entry point into the movement. Many highlighted educational experiences learning about past atrocities as a motivating factor to get involved in the movement: one person mentioned reading *The Diary of Anne Frank*, while another recalled learning about the Holocaust in school as a turning point. Some highlighted an interest in social justice and activism while in college, which led them to explore anti-genocide issues further. One person specifically pointed to learning about the Rwandan genocide as a motivator to get involved, saying:

I was shocked that almost one million people were killed largely with crude weapons in a country while I was alive and I had NEVER heard about it. Not from teachers, parents, family, friends, no one knew and no one talked about it.

Overall, it seems that education is a common entry point into the anti-genocide movement and activism in general. It is also interesting to note that education was brought up when participants were asked to define the movement.

When asked to describe the anti-genocide movement overall, some respondents brought up words such as “stagnant,” “growing,” “cyclical,” and “working to define & strategize.” Others pointed out that the movement is relatively new and has “sustained itself past its infancy



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and is now broadening and seeking direction.” While many people see the movement as passionate, energetic, and strong, they also pointed out that it lost some of the grassroots momentum it once had during its formation and needs to regain the vibrancy it once possessed. Reading through the responses, I get the sense that the movement is at a turning point in terms of its development; a point where it can harness the passion and energy of its members to develop new strategies for affecting change and bring new advocates into the fold. Perhaps the movement is a little burnt out and defeated. It needs something new—it needs a win—in order to reenergize itself moving forward. While the movement has a lot of work ahead, and while it needs to more carefully define itself, there are many lessons—good and bad—that it can learn from.

Survey participants were asked to mention some strengths of the movement; many people pointed to diversity in terms of the types of organizations and issue-areas that the movement encompasses. Several people highlighted the ability of these various organizations to come together to share resources and create a larger impact:

Some of the biggest strengths of the movement is that many organizations have been able to work well together for a common purpose and around common goals/advocacy points.

Other respondents mentioned the energy and passion of people active in the field as a sustaining force for good. Participants were also asked to reflect on successes of the movement. Some people mentioned specific campaigns such as Obama’s recognizing the “Rohingya,” the use of R2P in Libya, and sanctions against Sudan. Others pointed to the ability of the movement to raise general awareness of ongoing atrocities as a success.

Subsequently, participants were asked to consider some weaknesses of the movement. Many people pointed to the lack of political will and the fact that the movement is “nowhere near big enough to really win any legislative victories.” One person described the movement as blending “too easily with progressive politics,” arguing that the movement needs to appeal to both sides of the aisle in order to accomplish any sort of political victory. Another person highlighted the similarities between organizations that exist in the field, noting that new organizations keep popping up with attempts to “reinvent the wheel.” As new organizations pop up they may create competition for existing funding and resources which might ultimately harm the movement. A few people mentioned the need for people active in the movement to take time for self-care without feeling guilty. Additionally, one person noted that the movement needs to strengthen its ability to move the world “from early warning to early action.”

In terms of the movement’s greatest failures, several people pointed to current-day atrocities such as Sudan, Syria, and the Central African Republic. One respondent mentioned the inability of the field to keep the public informed about what is currently going on in places that were once in the media spotlight, such as Darfur. A second highlighted the loss of



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grassroots and student involvement in the movement when GI-Net and Save Darfur merged. Many people who had been active in these organizations paused their activism during the merger, and the movement has since had to make up for this lost momentum.

Thinking to the future, participants were asked to consider what the world would look like if the movement is successful. Many indicated that the world would mobilize more readily when faced with mass atrocity situations. Others pointed out the ultimate goal of the movement: a more peaceful world without mass killings. One person said it well: “When you spoke the name Syria, Sudan, Burma, etc, you would just think of places and people and not catastrophes.” I was expecting most answers to dwell on a completely genocide-free world, but many people pointed out that the world will never be free of mass atrocities; rather, it is our ability to respond to these deadly situations that demonstrates our success.

Finally, survey participants were asked to reflect on their hope for the anti-genocide movement. Many responses were similar: no more genocide; that the movement need not exist. One person wished for a future in which “kids learn about the term ‘genocide’ in school and relative case studies, at the same time “learn[ing] about what the U.S. does to remember, prevent, and end current atrocities,” highlighting again the importance of the movement’s ability to mobilize in the face of mass atrocity situations. Others were hopeful that the movement would continue to grow and strengthen itself to continue to educate the next generation.

“Never again” has often been the motto of the anti-genocide movement to remind us of horrors committed in the past, but it also serves as a challenge to stop these crimes from happening again. This survey offers a brief snapshot of the movement from different people active in the field and those on the fringes. It is always important to pause and take stock of both the triumphs and defeats in order to strengthen the movement overall, in order to continue to better define its goals and identify a path forward so that we can truly honor those two words: “never again.”