

## Conceptualizing Early Warning: Core Tasks, Challenges, and Potential Roles for Civil Society

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Speaker notes from “Early Warning for Protection: Technologies and Practice for the Prevention of Mass Atrocity Crimes,” Oxfam Australia  
Phnom Penh, Cambodia  
November 3, 2010

### I. Conceptualizing early warning for protection

- A. Think backwards...
  - 1. Who needs to do what to protect populations from mass atrocity crimes?
  - 2. What information/analysis do they need? What information would help them accomplish their goals?
- B. Defining early warning
  - 1. Collecting, analyzing and communicating
  - 2. Information about signs of escalation
  - 3. Situations that could lead to genocide, crimes against humanity or massive and serious war crimes
  - 4. Far enough in advance to take timely and effective preventive measures
- C. Misconceptions
  - 1. *Early warning means predicting what will happen*: In fact, early warning is more about describing plausible scenarios—including low probability, high consequence events—that can help avert these bad outcomes.
  - 2. *Early warning is never a problem*: In fact, the more accurate, timely, and effectively communicated is warning analysis, the more likely is effective preventive/protective action.
  - 3. *Early warning is in the exclusive province of governments, international organizations and technical experts*: In fact, NGOs, regional/country experts, and local civil society groups are increasingly recognized as having critical roles to play.

### II. Major challenges

- A. Filtering and “sense making”
  - 1. Massive amounts of information, will only increase
  - 2. Complex phenomena and limited knowledge
- B. Deciding when to warn
  - 1. “Overwarning” leads recipients of warning to neglect alerts
  - 2. “Underwarning” leads to surprise and lack of preventive or preparatory action
- C. Warning-response nexus
  - 1. Bureaucratic issues
  - 2. Political issues
  - 3. Cognitive issues

### III. Potential roles for civil society

- A. Information suppliers
- B. Analysts
- C. Communicators of early warning
- D. Providers of warning AND protection

### Additional information:

Risk factors and warning signs of genocide and mass atrocity crimes:

- “Structural” risk factors
  - Armed conflict
  - Autocratic regime
  - State-led discrimination
  - Leadership instability
  - History of genocide/mass atrocities
  - Nonviolent protest
  - Exclusionary ideology
  - High infant mortality
  - Ethnically polarized elite
  - Low trade openness
- Near-term warning signs:
  - Violence/human rights violations targeting civilians of identifiable groups
  - Evidence of organization/preparation/mobilization for mass violence
  - Denial of problems/resistance to international engagement
  - Impunity for perpetrators

Selected early warning resources:

- Global risk assessment:
  - Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination “genocide indicators”
  - Political Instability Task Force
  - Minority Rights Group’s *Peoples Under Threat*
  - Genocide Prevention Advisory Network
- Ongoing situation monitoring:
  - Human rights monitoring bodies (e.g., special rapporteurs)
  - International Crisis Group
  - News reporting
  - Regional early warning systems
  - Local/community networks
- Communication of early warning information
  - Special Advisers to the UN Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect
  - Mass media
  - Inter- and non-governmental genocide prevention networks
  - Potential victims/local communities

See also the Analysis Framework developed by the Office of the Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide:

<http://www.un.org/preventgenocide/adviser/pdf/OSAPG%20AnalysisFrameworkExternalVersion.pdf>