

EVAP Ep. 7: Karen Smith

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SPEAKERS

Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall, Karen Smith

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 00:12

Welcome to Expert Voices on Atrocity Prevention by the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. I'm Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall, Research Director at the Global Center. This podcast features one-on-one conversations with practitioners from the fields of human rights, conflict prevention and atrocity prevention. These conversations will give us a glimpse of the personal and professional side of how practitioners approach human rights protection and atrocity prevention, allowing us to explore challenges, identify best practices, and share lessons learned on how we can protect populations more effectively. In this episode we are joined by Karen Smith, former Special Adviser of the UN Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect. Karen currently teaches international relations at Leiden University in the Netherlands and is an honorary research associate at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, where she was an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Studies from 2011 to 2017. Between 2006 and 2007, she served as Secretary-General of the United Nations Association of South Africa. Karen holds a PhD in international relations from Stellenbosch University and has a research focus on non-western contributions to international relations, as well as on the changing global order. Thank you for joining us today, Karen.

K Karen Smith 01:29

Thanks so much for having me.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 01:31

Can you start by sharing with us your path to a career in international relations? Were there any specific experiences or events that dramatically shaped your worldview?

K Karen Smith 01:40

Sure, yeah. And I think there's also, you know, part of that is what brought me to IR, but also, thinking

about this actually made me realize that there were instances that also brought me to maybe R2P, which I hadn't realized before. So, I mean generally, you know, I'm South African, so I grew up partly in South Africa but I also grew up abroad because my dad was a diplomat. And so I think, you know, that in itself exposed me at an early age to what one might call 'the international' as a kind of abstract concept, and led me to develop what I would think is a lifelong fascination with it. But also being from South Africa and obviously growing up during the apartheid era, and then moving abroad, and being, I guess confronted with perceptions of people from outside about South Africa, and starting to realize the role of the international community in for example, the anti-apartheid struggle, but also this interface between the domestic in South Africa and the international. I think, you know, this led me to think about questions of what I now understand as being questions about sovereignty, and really debates about what should be regarded as interference in the domestic affairs of states. Which of course is something which is very relevant to the debates around R2P as well. And the other thing I think that was really, made a huge impact on me was the fact that, because I was educated in an international school, I had classmates from all over the world, and so when I subsequently heard about things like conflict in the former Yugoslavia, or civil war in Sudan, I thought about these places, and these conflicts that were happening in relation to my classmates and my friends that were from there. So, in that sense, these world events, you know, were less abstract to me and they had, they had something of a human face. And that then perhaps led me to, you know, go and study politics in the early 1990s in South Africa. And I guess this is when I became politically conscious I would say. Of course this was the time of South Africa's transition to democracy, and I was very much involved in the elections and subsequently also as a researcher for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. But if I think about how I really got to understanding the complexities of international relations, it was really through teaching about these questions, but also teaching about South Africa's political history and, you know, also thinking back about individuals that I met. In the course of teaching, I met for example, the wife of one of the so-called Cradock Four, which is an important case in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. These were four activists who had been killed by security policeman, and speaking to the widow of one of these people and hearing her views on all kinds of questions: revenge, forgiveness, amnesty, reconciliation, this really had a huge impact on me. Yeah, and then just maybe, you know, maybe briefly in terms of how my research then developed. I spent a lot of time thinking about the role of value-based foreign policy, as promoted by Nelson Mandela in South Africa, but also subsequently, you know, how difficult this is to reconcile with other priorities and interests that the state might have. And that led me to kind of more abstract questions about universalist potential of human rights in the context particularly of a changing global order, with the emergence of global governance groupings that South Africa was a part of like IPSA, or the BRICS. I could go on for a very long time, but I think I'll stop there, Jackie.

J

Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 05:37

That's really such a rich history of experience that led you to asking these big questions. I think a lot of the time, practitioners and policymakers think of academics in a frame of, building their knowledge strictly from being buried in a library somewhere. And we often forget that many have personal histories, or work trajectories that enrich their perspective on the world around them. And this is a perfect example of that.

K

Karen Smith 06:01

Absolutely, yeah. And I think sometimes people don't recognize that. You know, you kind of, you don't always reflect on your past in this way, and think about: what were some of the things that I experienced or some of the things I remember, and how might these things actually still impact on me, even if, you know, not in a very kind of conscious way?

J

Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 06:23

How did your academic pursuits eventually lead to your appointment as UN Special Advisor on the Responsibility to Protect?

K

Karen Smith 06:29

Well, that remains a mystery. So, you know, I did some work on R2P. I wrote some articles on, actually South Africa's position with regards to the Responsibility to Protect, in which, I guess, I would say I took a rather critical view, perhaps. So I wasn't necessarily, you know, advocating for R2P but trying to understand how South Africa had shifted from, essentially a champion, one could say, of R2P in 2005, to becoming perhaps a bit more skeptical about the idea, which I think, you know, is reflective of the positions of many states, not just in Africa, but from other parts of the world as well. And I think linked with my interest and my research into questions of changes in global governance, and you know, what I just mentioned earlier, as well, the rise of emerging powers, regional powers, and perhaps how they were interpreting and understanding these concepts, these principles in a different way, but also what their priorities and their thinking was about global governance questions more generally. I think that is what led me to be nominated for this position. So I guess that's a bit different from some of my predecessors. You know, people like Jennifer Welsh, perhaps, who are very much embedded in the literature on the Responsibility to Protect and atrocity prevention, and you know that, she is really an expert in that field. I wouldn't classify myself in that way. So perhaps I came to the position more as a kind of generalist, I would say.

J

Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 08:14

How did you view the UN system and R2P before you became Special Advisor?

K

Karen Smith 08:20

So, I guess, when I was much younger, I held the view of the UN that I think many young people share, which is a rather idealistic view. But I subsequently also taught courses about the UN, and so, you know, I was familiar with the workings of the organization, at least in theory, or in abstract, and also quite critical about its failings, which, I think, in large part, due to the fact that, you know, it is a huge bureaucracy and with that come all the, you know, the pathologies of big bureaucracies. And of course, I also knew, again in theory, that it was constrained very much by the influence of member states and that the UN is certainly not above or outside of global power dynamics, however much we would, maybe, want it to be. And also, of course, that it's not a single issue organization. It's a very peculiar organization, in that it has this very wide, broad general mandate, and so it constantly has to balance these different priorities. And, of course, that means that it sometimes gets it wrong. And so, you know, these were my ideas, I think about the UN, but when I joined it, and perhaps now reflecting back on the last two and a half years, I would say that many of these perceptions were reinforced in practice, and in practice they are, of course, even more frustrating. But at the same time, I got to interact with so many individuals who work for the UN and who are extremely dedicated to their work and to, I mean, forgive the cliché, but making the world a better place essentially. And so, when I think about it, you know, I, you mentioned, when you were reading out my bio, that I was involved in the UN Association of South Africa, also when I was younger. And, you know, my views about the UN in that sense, haven't changed that radically, I still believe in the importance of the organization and its values. But I'm also, I think, very much conscious of the limitations that the

organization has, particularly due to the fact that it consists of member states, essentially. And then you asked about the Responsibility to Protect specifically as well. And I have to say that before taking up the position as special advisor, I'd really thought about it, essentially in abstract academic terms. And, you know, going back to what you were saying earlier, you know, this is sometimes what academics do, think about these things in quite abstract terms. And so it was really only when I started doing the work at the UN that I really got to grips with the real impact that this, call it a principle or a norm, could have on the lives of people and therefore how important it was for us to protect it, and to advocate for it. And, you know, I will also admit that I myself had some misconceptions about it, based on perhaps an incomplete understanding of what exactly R2P was all about.

J

Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 11:23

Since you hinted at this a little in your last response, I'm wondering what stands out as some of the particularly challenging moments or geopolitical obstacles that you had to navigate?

K

Karen Smith 11:34

Yeah, I mean, I think they're, you know, one can point to particular issues, but for me it, if I think about the challenges, it's kind of more a persistent challenge, which is this challenge, which, you know, you will be familiar with as well, as constantly having to convince not just member states but also parts of the UN system of the value of atrocity prevention and the Responsibility to Protect. Especially in light of the fact that when I think of the UN, you know, I think that its failures with regards to atrocity prevention are actually what it is judged by, by most people around the world. You know, it's not all the fantastic work that the UN is doing in many, many issue areas, whether it's development and poverty alleviation, or managing disease, etc. When people think about the UN, they think about, where was the UN in Rwanda? Or where was the UN in Srebrenica, or, you know, where is the UN in Syria, or in the DRC, or in Myanmar? And so, you know, that, for me, was a kind of consistent struggle and frustration to have to make that case all the time about why this is actually really important. And I think linked to that is, you know, linked to that challenge is constantly having to address these pervasive misconceptions about R2P, and, you know, some of the most common ones, of course, are that it's a western concept, or it's really all about military intervention. And, you know, this is something I would come across in conversations with representatives of member states, in the same way that you might hear these misconceptions when you speak to people outside of the UN about R2P. And I think some other challenges, I mean, you hinted at this in terms of, you know, kind of geopolitical obstacles as well, is I think, being in this position, or having been in this position, just constantly being reminded as well that the great powers remain largely untouchable. And, you know, whether this has to do with human rights more generally, or atrocity prevention, the great powers can get away with things that perhaps smaller, less powerful states cannot. And I think another frustration linked to that was the fact that in the current environment, there are just fewer states that are willing to stand up and defend, very publicly and very vocally, human rights. And within the broader human rights agenda, of course, you know, R2P and atrocity prevention as well. And so overall, you know, it's an uphill battle, as is, I guess, all human rights related work, but, I mean, there are also positive moments. So maybe I can, you know, just mention a few of those as well. And one can kind of categorize these in terms of institutional advances. So, when one thinks about the institutionalization of R2P, at the UN, which, you know, one can have a debate about how significant that is in terms of affecting the lives of people on the ground, but we know that these things are politically important in a system like the global multilateral system and at the UN. So if we think about the fact that there were, in the past year, there were resolutions passed on R2P in both the Human Rights Council and in the General Assembly. And also I think there's been significant new thinking about the implementation side of R2P, particularly in the face of Security Council inaction. And I think a very interesting, you know, pathway to thinking differently has been, what about the General

Assembly? Because, of course, a lot of the criticism we hear about R2P is related to the Security Council. So the fact that, when the Security Council is deadlocked, what do we do then? And even though, you know, we've seen some, kind of creative innovations by the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly, there's really a lot that remains to be done. And for me, this is really important because it also addresses that criticism that a lot of states have, which is essentially a criticism, I think, about the Security Council. Right? So why are these decisions being taken in the Security Council? And so there's lots of potential and many, many prospects for thinking more generally about what can the General Assembly do? And what are some of the powers of the General Assembly that have been underutilized? And where of course, we have many more states that can then play an active role and not be constrained by the veto power of the P5.

J

Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 16:24

Thanks for sharing, so candidly, those ups and downs of your time as Special Advisor. Were there any initiatives that you were personally a part of as Special Advisor that you felt were particularly impactful or meaningful?

K

Karen Smith 16:37

Yeah, actually, there were. So you know, I made it sound as though it was all just challenges, but I think in terms of advances with regards to R2P I mentioned the institutionalization. But personally as well, for me, it was very important that I was able to write the SG's report last year, highlighting the role of women in the Responsibility to Protect, as this, of course, is something which had been largely missing from the discussion, especially in the UN. There, of course, have been academics who have pointed this out, and who have written quite extensively about this, but it was important for me to bring that into the UN and emphasize the role of women, not just as victims of atrocity crimes, but also emphasize their role as agents in terms of the peacemaking process, but also in terms of prevention. And then perhaps, the thing that I found most encouraging, was meeting with young people and individuals from different parts of the world who regard the Responsibility to Protect as a valuable tool for their own work, and who want to learn more about it and who see value in raising awareness about it and linking it to their own work. And maybe just on that point, I should also mention that something which could potentially have been a highlight in terms of reflecting how people on the ground see the value of R2P, and of course here I'm referring to the images, really the heartbreaking images of young protesters in Myanmar, I mean, that actually turned into one of my very low points because I knew that their calls were not going to be answered. And that really, the international community was not going to do what they were expecting the international community to do, which was essentially come to their aid.

J

Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 18:32

And I'm so glad that you mentioned the report on Women, Peace and Security and R2P. Because since R2P was adopted in 2005, the gender lens and the role of women more specifically has often been there in conversations, but it's been lacking from the implementation phase. It's one of those things that's in the background, it comes up, you know, anytime WPS conversations come up, it's there. But it's not front and center for risk analysis or response strategies very often. Given that member states often react to these reports and to your broader work, I'm curious how you found interactions with UN member states, either individually or in more regional groupings.

K

Karen Smith 19:11

Yeah, so, you know, it's a bit of a mixed bag, of course. So, some of the meetings you have are with, advocates of R2P I would say, or states that you know going into the meeting that they are going to be generally supportive - they're going to nod when you say things, they're going to agree with you about certain issues. But within that group, of course, there's also the distinction that can be made, I think, between those who will support R2P and atrocity prevention but then perhaps are less active in terms of implementing it, or operationalizing it. So, you know, broadly speaking, and of course, these are very broad general categories. But then, of course, there are the other groups, there are the other states that one knows you're going to be receiving a lot of criticism from them. You know going into the meeting, they, you know that this is not going to be an easy meeting, but perhaps those are sometimes the most satisfying, when you are able to reach some kind of common ground, even if it is just a recognition that, yes, of course, the work around atrocity prevention is important, and it's valuable. And we recognize that states have an individual responsibility to protect, but also in most cases, you know, all states will recognize that the international community also has this collective responsibility. So, that for me was, you know, also encouraging to be able to have these conversations that start off, you know, almost where you start off almost on opposite sides, but eventually, you are able to reach some common ground. Which also gives me hope, in terms of, you know, thinking about these issues in the future. The regional groupings, I only had some interaction really with the Africa group, which of course is a very important and a very powerful group within the UN. And, for me, it was important to also to reach out to this group, because there are also sometimes assumptions both within the UN, but also outside of the UN, that somehow, you know, Africa is critical of R2P, Africa, or so again, you know, Africa as a kind of homogenous group is somehow opposed to R2P, when, of course, this is not the case. And it's African states and African regional and sub-regional organizations who have actually done much of the very important work, in terms of operationalizing R2P on the ground, and taking atrocity prevention very seriously - whether they refer to it as R2P or not, you know, that's a different matter. But for me, it was important to also engage with these states and to make this connection that while some of them, there are many of them, who very actively and vocally support R2P at the UN, but even those who don't are actually doing this work. And so, yeah, I mean, you know, I was also engaging with other organizations, not in the UN context, but outside. So I've had a number of interactions with the Organization of American States as well, some interactions with ASEAN. And so, it's always interesting, of course, when you speak to individual member states, and then you speak to states within a multilateral context, whether that be an international organization, or a regional organization, and how that sometimes affects their positions a little bit as well.

J

Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 22:40

Absolutely. And I think highlighting the difference between the regional groupings is a really key point because they often try as hard as possible to be a reflection of all their individual states. There really is a key diplomatic skill that you had to show in order to balance that challenge of interacting with such diverse groups. And at the end of the day, the Special Adviser on R2P only receives a symbolic \$1 per year salary. And you still maintain your regular full time job during your tenure as Special Adviser. So with all these diplomacy skills you had to adapt to, how did you find balancing those two simultaneous roles of Special Adviser and academic?

K

Karen Smith 23:23

Well, maybe on that point, I should mention that, you know, I don't have any training and diplomacy, and so I'm not sure that I did a very good job with that because as you as you know, academics, you know, are not necessarily known for their diplomatic skills, but rather known for speaking their mind. So, perhaps

that would be a recommendation for future special advisers to receive some kind of training in international diplomacy, or not, right, depending on what you want them to achieve. But yes, it was challenging, it was very challenging, trying to balance my, what I would regard as my main job, the job that essentially pays the bills, my academic job, with this part time job as Special Adviser. And it really was less about the money than it was about the time but of course, you know, money can also buy time. I mean I would actually say that it's impossible to do justice to the importance of this work on atrocity prevention, R2P, and that is incredibly frustrating. And I think the reason it's impossible to really do the job very well, and then, of course, this raises questions about, you know, the value or the importance attached to this position, but also to this agenda within the UN, if it remains this part-time position. I think the most important thing for me of having to do it part-time and not being in New York is that I very quickly realized the value and the importance of just being in the room. And what I mean by that is, to have atrocity prevention on the table, right, to have it being discussed, and sometimes that just does not happen when someone from the Office of Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect is not in the room. And given that it's a small office, and some of these meetings happen at the senior level, that means that there's not somebody there who is emphasizing that that is an important issue which needs to be addressed. So, in that sense, you know, I think that was a huge drawback and something which I found very frustrating. The other thing I think that is just of immense importance, I mean, in all kinds of, you know, work that people do, but particularly in international diplomacy, is the importance of building relationships. And again, you know, that's something that you can only do if you are consistently engaging with people, exchanging ideas, and that allows you to engage in real dialogue. And that's simply not possible when you're not in New York, and you're doing this, you know, meeting with people maybe twice a year at most.

J

Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 26:15

Thanks for raising those points. And, I know you're being humble and said you didn't come with diplomatic experience, but you clearly had a wealth of other skill sets coming into this role. I'm curious how your career in academia specifically may have served you during your tenure as Special Adviser?

K

Karen Smith 26:32

I think, well, I'll tell you about what I think are some of the benefits, but maybe I should start off by saying that perhaps being an academic, you know, complicates things more than anything else. Well, partly also, because of what I've just said that, I think it's in the nature of academics to be critical, and to question rather than to take a firm stance on issues. And I think this does not serve one particularly well in international diplomacy. But on the upside, I think it does allow one to see things from different perspectives, and to see the value of hearing different perspectives and really respecting them and taking them seriously. And I think the other thing that, you know, academics have, which I think people, whether it's people in international diplomacy working in international organizations, or pretty much anywhere else, don't have the time for is the time to read widely, and really to engage with issues at a much deeper level. So, not just reading a one or two page, you know, policy, executive summary about an issue, but really getting into the issue. But, that then, in a sense, also comes back to my first point that that complicates things, because then suddenly, nothing is as simple as it seems. So there's no kind of black or whites, everything is gray. And so that can of course, also, yeah, I think be a constraint in terms of taking strong positions on issues, whether in international diplomacy or elsewhere. At the same time, I think being an academic and coming from a, you know, humanities, social sciences background, also allows one to recognize that really, you know, the world is socially constructed. In the sense that it's, you know, it's a creation of humans. And, that comes with the potential for change, right? Because if we constructed it, we can change things. And often that change lies in just thinking differently about things, right. It lies in the

power of language. And so I think having an academic background perhaps doesn't mean that other people don't think about the world in this way, but it just kind of hones those skills and allows one to recognize these things in, I think, a much more explicit manner.

J

Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 28:53

Just to shift gears a bit. Your tenure as Special Adviser coincided with some crucial developments in the world of atrocity prevention, including the 15th anniversary of the adoption of R2P at the World Summit. Were there any developments during this 15th anniversary year that stood out to you in terms of R2P and atrocity prevention more broadly?

K

Karen Smith 29:15

So, last year, of course, was an interesting year also, not just for the fact that it was the 15th anniversary of the adoption of the Responsibility to Protect, but we also celebrated the 75th birthday of the United Nations, and it was also the 20th anniversary of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda as such. And so I think the fact that all of these different agendas, and events coincided was significant in itself, in terms of reminding us, you know, what was the purpose of the founding of the UN and how does that relate to R2P and atrocity prevention? But also, I mentioned the report on women and R2P earlier and so also reflecting a little bit on the role of women in these agendas. So, I think there were interesting questions that came up around the connections between these different celebrations that we were having last year. But I think in general, if I have to reflect on, you know, R2P at 15, which of course, we were doing quite a lot last year, I think I would generally say that, you know, we've come a long way, but there's still a long way to go. And so if we look outside of the UN, perhaps, there's still not much knowledge about R2P. So, there's a lot of awareness raising and education that still needs to be done. And inside the UN, I think what we've seen in the last few years is a very strong desire to move from talking about R2P in kind of abstract terms, and whether or not it's a good thing, or it's not a good thing, and what are the problems with the principle, to actually just, you know, operationalizing it. So getting our hands dirty and doing the work. And, shifting to really asking the question, what are states in the UN system doing to implement the commitment that they made in 2005? And I think another thing to mention, in terms of where we are with R2P, now at 16 years, is that the the principal has a lot more support inside the UN than most people outside of the UN think there is. And, you know, that can be measured in different ways, for example, voting in the General Assembly. But also, I think we need to be careful in terms of making generalizations about the support. So again, there's often this idea that, you know, the Global North supports R2P, the Global South doesn't. And I think this is really problematic, because we know that that is not the case, and that it actually has broad regional, cross-regional support within the General Assembly, and also there are individual states from different parts of the world who take a very active role in promoting R2P. If we just look at those, the Chairs of the Group of Friends for example, currently, Botswana, Costa Rica and Denmark, and previously Qatar. So, I think this is a reflection of the broad support that there is for R2P. And on the other side then, we have this small but very vocal group of states that essentially reject R2P for pretty ideological reasons, because they find sovereignty a useful concept to hide behind. But, I think the fact that they are allowed and that they are vocal, means that people outside overestimate the influence that they actually have within the UN and also their number. So I think, you know, last year was an important year to reflect on some of these things, and really think about where do we stand in terms of support for R2P as well.

J

Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 32:59

Those are some really insightful points on what the last year brought us and what it taught us. And, just

wondering if we could push it a little further. What do you perceive as being most helpful or useful in improving how the international community adheres to the Responsibility to Protect in practice? And I guess, to flip the coin on that, as well, what in your opinion tends to most often detract from the prevention of mass atrocities of the UN?

K

Karen Smith 33:26

So, I think maybe starting starting backwards from, you know, what detracts from it, I think we, and when I say we, I mean, you know, the international community, lose focus when we get into polarized debates about who's promoting certain agendas for which purposes. And that's not to dismiss these concerns and these criticisms, as you know, unjustified. Many of them, of course, are based on justified concerns, for example, the criticism from some states in the Global South about the double standards or the selectivity of certain states, particularly in the Security Council, when they apply Responsibility to Protect. And we have to, of course, take into account the historical experience of some of the states that lies beneath us and by this, of course, I mean, the historical experience of colonialism, of imperialism. And, so, the flip side of that is that we really need all states to recognize that R2P is not something that applies only to certain states, and that it's not only a foreign policy issue, then. And I think, if, you know, some states continue to view it in this way, and that undermines the ability of R2P to really be accepted by all states globally, because there is this constant suspicion that some states are viewing it as something which belongs in their foreign policy toolbox, and not something which they need to reflect on in terms of what is happening nationally in their own countries with regards to atrocity prevention. And so it's really important, I think, in terms of what you refer to as R2P adherence among states, that all states recognize their historical baggage when it comes to the commission of atrocities, and also recognizes their existing and perhaps future vulnerabilities. Because I think, only in that way can we achieve somewhat of a more level playing field, where all states recognize that this is a conversation that we can all be part of, and we can, you know, exchange ideas, we can share best practice. And this is not something which some states get to tell other states how to do.

J

Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 33:33

I think that's a really strong takeaway from your tenure, because it touches on all of the challenges that come with, not just atrocity prevention and R2P, but also the human rights agenda, and all other UN agendas that are regularly under attack by key group of states that are vehemently opposed to some of those ideals that we all hold quite dear.

K

Karen Smith 36:14

Maybe I just add something as well about what needs to happen for the prevention of mass atrocities, to be advanced both within the UN system but also without. I think the really important thing is for it to be put on the table in all conversations. Whether it is about development assistance, or it's about peacebuilding, or it's about counterterrorism, it's really important that atrocity prevention is taken into account because we've seen from historical experience what happens when it is not prioritized and other agenda items are given preference. And Myanmar, of course, is a textbook example of this. I also think we need to, as an international community but specifically in the UN where this has become quite an important phrase, is this idea about prevention. I think we need to think long and hard about what exactly prevention means, particularly in the context of atrocity prevention, and how this might differ from broader prevention agendas.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 37:19

And just to wrap up, for our listeners who are curious about what your life is like after the UN, now that you've returned to academia full-time, how will you continue working to help improve the challenges you encountered as Special Adviser, and the lives of vulnerable populations around the world?

K Karen Smith 37:36

I think my answer to that would be that I will do so perhaps more indirectly in future, and by that I mean, through teaching. And both specifically teaching about the Responsibility to Protect and atrocity prevention, but also more generally. I think it's really important to encourage young people, in my case, the students who sit in my classes, to engage with the inequalities and injustices that are so prevalent in the world around us, and for them to then use their knowledge to go out and change it in whatever career they find themselves in. Because I think, you know, probably the main takeaway for me, over the past few years has been that Responsibility to Protect, atrocity prevention, human rights, cannot be left up to the members of the Security Council or the Human Rights Council, or even states in general. It's really up to all of us. And by that I mean, civil society organizations but also individuals to do what we can using the platforms that we have.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 38:45

Thank you for joining us for this episode of expert voices on atrocity prevention. If you'd like more information about the Global Centre's work on R2P, mass atrocity prevention, or populations at risk of mass atrocities, visit our website at globalr2p.org and connect with us on Twitter and Facebook @GCR2P.