

EVAP Ep 55 Special Adviser Beyani

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SPEAKERS

Chaloka Beyani, Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 00:11

Welcome to Expert Voices on Atrocity Prevention by the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. I'm Jaclyn Streitfeld- Hall, Deputy Executive Director at the Global Centre. 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. Today, I am joined by Chaloka Beyani, UN Under- Secretary- General and Special Adviser to the Secretary- General on the Prevention of Genocide. Special Adviser Beyani previously served as UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced P ersons, and as a member of the UN High Level Independent Fact Finding Mission to Libya. Thank you for joining us today.



Chaloka Beyani 01:07

Thank you very much for having me.



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 01:10

Special Adviser Beyani, you assumed your role in August 2025. Can you give us some insight on your background and sort of what brought you to this place in this moment.

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Chaloka Beyani 01:22

Well, my background is as an international lawyer specializing in human rights, international humanitarian law, and the interface with international refugee law and the protection of internally displaced persons. And I was motivated to do that in the context of my history in Zambia, where I grew up as a student. Zambia hosted liberation movements from all over southern Africa, and we supported liberation movements, and in their quest for self-determination, which pointed to the initial interest in international law, international humanitarian law and refugee law, of course. And then I started teaching international law very early in my career at the University of Zambia, I think from '84 onwards. And when you're taught human rights, the first thing that came was the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide as the first human rights instrument that the United Nations adopted in 1948, prior to the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. And so you were curious about what was genocide, you went into the history of the convention, you learned about the Holocaust, extermination, and the way in which Lemkin then came up with the term genocide in relation to the destruction, in whole or in part, of national, ethnic, religious, or racial groups by certain methods that are specified in the Genocide Convention. And later on, when I specialized in international refugee law, of course, I came across the term "a well-founded fear of persecution" and persecution is critical to genocide. And the whole regime about the protection of refugees also started after the First World War and crystallized during and after the Second World War. But there you have a well-founded fear of persecution on grounds of race, religion, nationality, social group, or political opinion, so there's an equation between all those three categories, which for me made this whole area of law interesting as an academic subject, but also for the sad fact that it pertained to the way in which groups were ill treated and it related to their protection, and the humanitarian instincts I developed as a student propelled me along this line. And then, of course, I became Special Rapporteur for IDP subsequently, but before that I had gone through Rwanda just of the genocide in 1994. Then, I was a member of the board of directors at Oxfam, and from about April 1994 Oxfam staff sent messages to headquarters saying, "There are mass killings here of the Tutsis, and we think that this is genocide. Can we call it as such?" We then asked them to send evidence to headquarters. I was the lead member of the Board of Directors for basic rights, as well as complex emergencies. So, I was the focal point, examined the evidence, and came to the conclusion that it was genocide. And therefore Oxfam was one of the first organizations to call it genocide. Thereafter, by about June, Oxfam sent me on a verification mission, I think, after the RPF had entered Rwanda, July, I think it was, and I went. When I became Special Rapporteur for IDPs, one of the guiding principles for the protection of IDPs is protection from genocide in Guiding Principle 10, which, when I formulated the African Union Convention on IDPs, I included that. And later, because of my connections with genocide in Rwanda, I became the legal advisor to the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, which was looking at the issues of genocide tensions between Rwanda and DRC, and that led to the Pact on Security, Stability, and Development in the Great Lakes, which I drafted, and in that was the first instrument after the Genocide Convention, the



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 07:00

That's such a rich history and career trajectory. I'm so fascinated by where you've been and where you've taken it, and it's really incredible what you just said about really being able to seize a prevention side of that mandate. We've actually never had an active Special Adviser on Genocide Prevention on the podcast before. So, I'd love it if you could give kind of a brief overview of the work of the office and maybe give some insight into how you've used your background to personally approach your mandate.



Chaloka Beyani 08:26

The office was established in 2004 after the Rwanda genocide, that the UN did not have an early warning system, you know to warn them of the possibilities of genocide, and also to prevent genocide. After that, the Srebrenica massacre happened, as I said, that subsequently led to the creation of the other side of the office, the responsibility to protect populations from war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, as well as genocide. So, the office is a joint office. The mandates of the special advisors on genocide, on the one hand, which I hold, and of the special advisor on the responsibility to protect Ambassador Mark Bleeker, who holds that office, I joined. They are distinct, but they are complementary, and they both work in order to prevent and protect populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing. When the office was set up, it was given a clear mandate by the then Secretary General, as well as the Security Council, which is to collect information from within the UN system, crystallize that information, turn it into an early warning system to the Secretary General. And through the Secretary General to the Security Council of situations that, if not prevented or dealt with, are likely to lead to genocide. The office is not mandated to determine genocide as such. It's an early warning system, and within the early warning system, who have infused early action. The office established a framework of analysis very early on with risks and indicators in terms of genocide, you know, for example, if there is an armed conflict of an ethnic, religious, racial character, then obviously that's an indicator, and using that indicator, you can then determine the risks, which populations are at risk of being either exterminated or of being attacked in that regard, and the framework of analysis is the main governing framework that the office has used in its early warning early action system. It uses this on both sides of the office, in relation to genocide prevention and in relation to the responsibility to protect the mandate of the responsibility to protect, also formulated by a later by the Secretary General in 2007 related much more to consolidating the conceptual aspects and understanding of the responsibility to protect, but now it's quite clear that from an aspiration to an expectation there is more that is expected of the responsibility to protect, and therefore a guidance note is being prepared on sustaining the responsibility to protect, outlining its scope and also the way in which it relates to war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing. So, if we see an early warning system that obviously brings up certain risks, then we send an advisory note to the Secretary General showing what the indicators are, what the risks are, and what the action that is supposed to be taken, you know, should be the Secretary General may act on that advice, may send it to the Security Council. So, ever since I assumed the mandate, for example, the issues in Sudan and South Sudan have been escalated to the Secretary General, they've also been escalated to the Security Council, and of course it's up the Security Council to see what measures it may take, but within the UN system we also are part of interagency task forces, working groups, ad hoc groups at a senior level, at the level of the principals, where we are part of the prevention platform, part of the system of the UN that puts up countries for horizon scanning and horizon scanning review, and after review,

there may be escalated to the executive committee of the Secretary General, and from him to the Security Council, and we play a very decisive role because of our expertise in terms of the foreseeability of the risk of mass atrocities, including genocide. We relate the residence coordinators, more than 100 that are based in countries, because we don't have a field presence, and there we infuse our framework of analysis with them to help them analyze and understand situations that may involve genocide or other trusted crimes, which is the real challenge that you know the concept of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity amongst the agencies is not very well understood, especially amongst the humanitarian agencies. So we extend our hand to their work to try and make sure that there's a holistic approach within the UN.



Chaloka Beyani 14:18

We reach out to the Peace Building Commission, as well, we reach out to the Human Rights Council's Universal Peer Review mechanism, so that when countries are reviewed, if there are those that we're investigating, then at least we include our framework of analysis, and the Human Rights Council can use that to investigate and raise specific questions that pertain the risks of genocide crimes against humanity or war crimes, so in a nutshell, that's how we operate.



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 14:57

That's really incredible to hear how. Well, integrated within the system you are, and also kind of that the educational role, because you're correct that a lot of a lot of people, both within the UN, as well as in governments in the systems we operate in, don't have that awareness of atrocity risk and an understanding that what they're witnessing can potentially lead to genocide or crimes against humanity or war crimes. Now I know your office has both kind of a political and technical function, you know, you do a lot of this behind the scenes work within the UN system, but you also have issued some public statements, particularly when warning signs of atrocity crimes emerge. So, how do those two kind of functions work together for you?

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Chaloka Beyani 15:51

Well, the later establishing the mandate of the office outlined the methodology of the office, and it clearly pointed out that the special advisor shall rarely make public statements in order to give the Secretary General time to act, and for that reason, although the office does make statements, but it does so very, very carefully and in a measured way, you know the very title of the office is threatening. You look at an issue, you issue a statement in relation to a particular situation, and then that country, or group of countries, of course, come back to you and say, "Do you actually mean that there's a risk of genocide in our country, or you request a visit for certain reasons, so there has to be a delicate balance. The technical work is obviously done by very competent staff within the office who have years of experience in applying the framework of analysis, interacting with other agencies or offices, Department of Political Affairs, for example, Department of Peacekeeping, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. So, before you issue a public statement, you would have to share that statement with those entities, or at least a good number of entities. You would also have to notify the Secretary General, because you advise him essentially, so you don't have to go back behind his back to release a statement or say this is what I've said, but we reserve those moments, at least since I've assumed office in situations that are critical and in situations that the Secretary General himself may not have addressed, the High Commissioner may not have addressed, but they are very central to the Genocide Convention, R.E. when groups that have national, racial, religious, ethnic characteristics are threatened. Then, of course, we have a voice. The other side of the office on the responsibility to protect may also speak out when it sees that there's a failure to exercise the responsibility to protect by a particular state in the context of war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. That's what makes their roles complementary. My office is limited to the province of genocide. The other office has a broader pay view, so we have to correlate quite obviously in doing what we have to do, so at a technical level, there's a great deal of work that's being done in terms of scanning. We are looking at countries around the world, you know, we're looking at situations in Afghanistan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, to some extent, we are looking at situations in the Western Balkans, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, and of course in the Caucasus as well, in the context of Ukraine and the conflict involving Russia, we look at the situation involving Armenia, for example, and Azerbaijan. There's a peace framework there, and obviously pushing it forward and making sure that it is consolidated. That's an important aspect in Latin America, Colombia is quite obvious, Venezuela, and the situation of indigenous groups across Latin America that are at risk of being subjected to conditions that may bring about their destruction because of the active. It is of the extraction industries, whether it's mines or timber or simply water, you know, there's a complete mouth, mouth causality in terms of climate issues, and in terms of issues that relates to, you know, to extraction that pose a huge risk in Africa, both Sudan's Sudan and South Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, you know, quite obviously the Central African Republic, the whole of Africa, the Sahel, as well, Mali, Chad, that whole area, so you know our resources are limited, our office is small, but we use the UN system to try and have a broad outreach in all those areas, and to share the information that we, we are collecting, and also to get further information from them that we analyze and synthesize into indicators and risk analysis,



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 21:07

you know, you just listed a significant number of countries and situations where there are considerable risk, and the global center, you know, similarly monitors approximately 30 country situations right now, so I'm curious, how do you sustain urgency on neglected crises when political attention and will is elsewhere?



Chaloka Beyani 21:31

Well, I think that's our role, because political attention sometimes is fashionable, by that I mean it is media driven, it's driven by audio visual images, narratives, and as soon as one narrative becomes tired or when another one, which seems to be a bit more gripping, comes up, then everything gravitates, but for us, we remain focused, even on old situations, you know, to make sure that we still keep an eye on those situations, we keep an eye on the situation between wonder democratic of the Congo, for example, we still monitor head speech in the context of Bosnia and Hisgovina, or the West Balkans in our offices, also the focal point within the UN for countering head speech and implementing the UN strategy and plan of action on head speech, and that takes us everywhere in old situations, denial of the Holocaust, for example, denial of genocide in Srebrenica, and even denial of the decisions made by international tribunals that met findings of guilt in terms of genocide and the perpetrators, so denial in itself is a state of impunity. It's a state that relates to the fact that the ideology of genocide still continues to be perpetrated in one way or another, and so we also have an outreach with international criminal tribunals, the residual mechanisms of both the Rwanda and Yugoslav tribunals, and people think those are old cases, but in fact there are still some cases being determined there. We follow what's happening at the International Criminal Court, and really is with the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. We follow the proceedings before the International Court of Justice as well. So, the other injunctions that we have is if matters are before International Courts, then we don't comment on them publicly, but at least we continue to carry out our investigative work, so we may not say something on Gaza at the moment because of the pending case brought by South Africa against Israel, but at the same time we've got technical work going on that continues to monitor that situation in conjunction with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and also other agencies, so for us there's no forgotten situation as such.



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 24:30

I want to pick up on something you were mentioning earlier in terms of the framework of analysis, because your office is very much the custodian of the framework of analysis, and as you said, you use it as a tool, and also you know, ensure it's used by others in the just over a decade since it was first published, and numerous global challenges and developments that contribute to atrocity risks have emerged. In those years, how do.. how do you and your office engage with and monitor areas that are not explicitly captured in the framework, including threats posed by climate change? I know you just mentioned, you know, the risks facing indigenous populations, for example, as well as digital technologies, organized criminal violence in hybrid contexts, and things like that, that maybe aren't explicitly mentioned.

 Chaloka Beyani 25:27

Yeah, we treat the framework as a living framework. It's not static, it's not set in stone. The only thing that limits us, of course, is that it was adopted by the Security Council, so because it was adopted by the Security Council, we may not, in the present geopolitical circumstances, seek to revise it, because the consequences may be quite clear, but we look at adaptability of the framework, as in climate change, so last year, towards the end of last year, I think early December, we had a group of experts, some of whom were involved in elaborating the framework of analysis, some of whom had worked with the office over a period of time, and others knew to look at how the framework of analysis can be adapted, can be applied precisely to the situations that you know that you mentioned climate change, it's quite clear that it poses an existential threat and a risk to major populations, and if the effects of climate change are neglected or not dealt with. That's one way of exposing populations to conditions calculated to bring about their destruction. As in the context of genocide, we are looking at gender-related hate speech, for example, and preparing a guidance note on that, because of the technologies that you have mentioned, artificial intelligence, sexualized images of women in digital form on public platforms, the Secretary General established an artificial intelligence advisory board, the UN, which is available, you know, to the UN as a whole, and so we obviously hope to link into that work. The senior management committee was addressed by some experts on artificial intelligence on how, at least, to use it as a force for good, but also how to counteract the adverse effects of artificial intelligence, as I said, we're also looking at a guidance note on the responsibility to protect, so the guidance notes help us to reshape some of the tools by reference to the framework of analysis, but by not actually revising it, we can extend its application and analysis to other situations, as mentioned, but still keep the framework as it is. But it is a living framework. So, after the assessment and evaluation by experts last year, we took note of what they said and of their advice, and we hope to inculcate that very much into our work,

 Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 28:22

like you said, it's a living document, so even though you don't necessarily want to do a formal kind of written published revision that has to go through the council, understanding kind of how it applies to the world, how the world shifts it is really fantastic. I want to turn quickly to one of the situations you mentioned earlier, which is Sudan, because it is one of the situations that you personally have made public statements on, including with the AU special advisor on the prevention of atrocities, who also previously served in the UN special advisor role at Dama Diang. What actions do you think are important with regards to sustaining attention on Sudan, ensuring prevention of further atrocities, particularly given warnings of potential genocide, including the FFM's recent report on the siege and subsequent takeover of Al Fashir by the RSF in October 2025

 Chaloka Beyani 29:30

Yeah, the situation in Sudan and Dafo and El Fascher wasn't entirely new to me, because as Special Rapporteur for IDPs, I went there, I believe it was in 2012 to Dafoe. I visited El Fassia, Nyala, then the RSF with the ginger weed. They're already involved in atrocities in Darfur, you recall. And there was an international commission of inquiry into four in the 1990s so the

situation has actually continued, but what has now changed, and which calls for attention is the fact that at the time in the 1920 12 2014 you know, the strategy was very much to contain the African populations in Dafo in IDP camps, Zamzam camp was one of those, but with the latest sort of siege on El Fascia, that strategy actually changed. Then the analysis was its headers versus landed groups, you know, its containment, but now it turns to extermination, as the massacres actually indicated, and when we looked at that clearly within the framework of analysis, they are protected groups, the Zagawa, the Maliset, the Fur groups of African descent attacked by Arab militia and the RSF because of their Arabization policy that Sudan should be an Arab country and get rid of the brotherhood that is in the military and also get rid of the African groups, so within that Arabization policy you see the makings of a plan, you see the makings of a design, you see the makings of an intent, which is accompanied by head speech, so that change in strategy meant that several actions had to be taken in conjunction with the AU advisor colleague at Dhamma Dieng, as you said, was a distinguished occupant of this office. First of all, to sensitize the international community and call for attention, so we had a joint statement to the Human Rights Council. Then we had the division of labor, he took good to Port Sudan and address the Sudan armed forces, the de facto regime or government in relation to the activities of the RSF, and of course, their own activities, and he met with the representatives of the government at very high level. He undertook a mission to Kenya, more to deal with the RSF and their base in Nairobi, their stakeholders and others who have a keen interest in South Sudan, and of course addressed the leadership of the RSF, the permanent missions or embassies that have interests in there, and called for several measures, essentially cessation of hostilities, establishment of a humanitarian corridor for the movement of civilians, but also for the delivery of humanitarian assistance established at the militarized zone, since the conflict is largely urban in the urban areas around Nyala, El Fascia, and also to the Cordophons, the border between South Sudan and Sudan, where the conflict has now, you know, moved on to, and then have long-term security sector reform, integration of the RSF and the Sudan armed forces, but with appropriate, you know, safeguards, essentially background checks, vetting processes, and accountability, you know, for those who have committed international crimes. And we took this message internationally. I had a press conference, and the press release was met, and most of the actions that we have called for revolve around those issues. Recently, I had a mission to the African Union, and to the African Union that was part of the discussion, the role of the African Peace and Security Council in the context of Sudan, but also in the context of our relationship with this office, my office and the office of mr. Yang, so that our early warning system is part of the African Continental Early Warning Mechanism and can be utilized by the African Peace and Security Council, and that if we send an advisory note to Security Council through the Secretary General, we should be able to address the African Peace and Security Council on the same dynamics, which I think was accepted, the operationalization of the Malabo protocol on criminal jurisdiction, which was adopted in. To, but only one state, so far, has ratified it, and so pushing for advocacy for that protocol to come in force, and other mechanisms of accountability, and also activating Article 4h of the Constitutive Act, the right of the union to intervene in member states in situations of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and to try and agree a framework, a police framework around which to activate that provision and how to implement it.



Chaloka Beyani 35:37

So these are all measures that we're still looking at in the context of Sudan, but addressing the parties, I think, was the second most important issue after releasing the statement, so that they know that the world is watching, and with that there are possible consequences and measures that may actually follow, and also to back the work that is being done by others, the African Union, c5 and their work, and of course the group of countries that are looking into those issues, the quartet and the code, and trying to eliminate multiple platforms. Let's have at least a single platform by which the discussions can be held, and measures then agreed in terms of how to move forward.



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 36:33

Do you think all of these measures kind of reflect learning on behalf of the international community, in terms of global efforts to prevent genocide, you know, you talked about the parallels between the earlier genocide in Darfur and all of the atrocities from, you know, over 20 years ago to what we're seeing now, so have we kind of learned from the gaps that remained after that genocide ended in terms of our approach to the current



Chaloka Beyani 37:09

one. Yeah, I think the major lesson is to leave no gaps, is to have a continuum of both prevention and protection measures, and somehow in the context of Dafoe, you know, after you know the original Commission of Inquiry, the early warnings that were there, and it seemed as if, you know, the ginger weeds activities died down, and then you had massive demonstrations in Sudan that led to the overthrow of the military, and people thought the military is now, you know, out of the way, and there will be a civilian government, and the civilian government will ensure peace, security, and stability, but in all of that, you know, one gap is, of course, the military came back and overthrew the civilian government that had been established and worse off the RSF and the Sudan armed forces, then broke up over issues of security sector reform, DDR, disarmament, immobilization, and reintegration, and disagreement on how to do that, and became two separate entities that now are bent on continuing to fight, and even when you caution that none of them can win the conflict, both of them are keen that they want to secure a military victory over the other that sets the context for mass atrocities. It's an early warning sign, you know, for the prevention of genocide within Darfur and Sudan. You look at the whole region, you know, only today there were skirmishes between the RSF and the Sudan armed forces close to the border with Ethiopia, and Ethiopia has had to take measures, you know, to protect the integrity of its boundaries, so the spillover is likely in neighboring countries, such as Ethiopia, such as Kenya, for example, you know, very, very likely, and so it's important that there are cohesive measures taken nationally, regionally, as well as internationally.



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 39:39

I want to close by asking, you know, kind of bringing it back down from this sort of multilateral big processes that we all think about in terms of atrocity prevention and genocide prevention, and just bring it to, you know, the communities and populations affected by its. Atrocities, so I'm curious, how does your office work with civil society, local human rights defenders, and affected populations who are obviously the most impacted by atrocities, but are often the first to see warning signs and respond in the aftermath of atrocities.



Chaloka Beyani 40:19

One thing we've actively done starting with the Great Lakes area is the reactivation of the genocide prevention committees, which are committees that have government, civil society, traditional leaders as well, and operate at national level and also engage with religious and traditional leaders. We've got a plan of action for religious traditional leaders to build social cohesion that we engage with, and indeed in Sudan, we are looking at activating that with the support of some of the countries in the region, we engage with civil society in Kenya for Sudan. These are Sudanese civil society representatives, and indeed we had online meetings here with them too, when they sounded the nail out, and they say the major issue is impunity, because they are on the ground, so collecting information, monitoring, and feeding to us in relation to some of the information that we have, or to collaborate, or which we do not actually have, is an important aspect of outreach engagement, you know, problem or approach, and then, of course, we do deal, as I said, with figures that have spiritual voices on the ground, so our task is to identify those figures with the involvement of civil society and, of course, local populations themselves, they should own the solutions, you know, that affect them in terms of how they see prevention better undertaken, as well as protection.



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 42:18

Thank you for joining us for this episode of expert voices on atrocity prevention. If you enjoyed this episode, we encourage you to subscribe to the podcast on Apple Podcasts, SoundCloud, or Spotify, and we'd be grateful if you left us a review. For more information on the Global Center's work on RTP, mass atrocity prevention, and populations at risk of mass atrocities, visit our website at [www dot global are the number two p.org](http://www.globalarethenumber2p.org) and connect with us on Facebook Blue Sky or LinkedIn at GCR 2p