

The Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide

Established in July 2004, the Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide was created to serve the UN Secretary-General as an early warning mechanism, and to liaise with the UN system on activities that could diminish the prospects of genocide.¹ Led by Special Adviser Francis Deng, and supported by the Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect, Edward Luck, the two appointees have been tasked to work together on these interconnected issues.

The proposal by the Secretary-General to institutionalize the collaboration through a joint Office has yet to be approved by the General Assembly's Fifth Committee, the UN's administrative and budgetary apparatus. Intended to strengthen the UN's capacity to anticipate, prevent and respond to situations where there was a threat of mass atrocities, and to enable a broad-based UN response to crises relating to the responsibility to protect (R2P), the proposal caused heated debates during the Committee's December 2010 deliberations.² Discussions on the feasibility of joining the concepts of genocide and R2P under the mandate of one office underlined the highly politicized environment in which administrative and budgetary discussion are being taken and showed that member states continue to have reservations about institutionalizing the concept of R2P.

During 2010-2011, the Office was confronted with a variety of complex country-specific situations, including responding to the outbreak of violence in Kyrgyzstan in June 2010, the inter-group tensions in the lead up to Guinea's November 2010 elections, and the post-electoral crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, where the two special advisers expressed their grave concern about the continuing reports of violent attacks and hate speech directed at specific ethnic and national groups.³

The Office also took a stance in addressing the reports of mass violence from Libya. On 22 February 2011, just one week after the widespread demonstrations against Colonel Qadhafi's regime had begun, Deng and Luck released a statement reiterating the responsibility of states to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. The high-profile message also warned that if crimes of such a scale could be confirmed, national leaders should be held accountable.⁴ In the subsequent weeks, these words became an important component of the extensive political initiatives to find a solution to the Libyan conflict. Ultimately, the Security Council was compelled to intervene, and while it is unclear whether the Office's efforts directly influenced the Council's decision, its normative contribution should not be overlooked.

The Advisers' proactive stance on Libya and the international community's response will undoubtedly bring more attention to the Office's work. As a result, the impending challenge for Special Advisers Deng and Luck will be whether they can harness this increased awareness and mobilize appropriate responses to prevent mass atrocities in the future.

- 1 United Nations. *Letter dated 12 July 2004 from the Secretary-General to the President of the Security Council*, (S/2004/567) (13 July 2004).
- 2 Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, "ACABQ and Fifth Committee negotiations on the Joint Office" Jan 2011, available at <http://www.responsibilitytoprotect.org/GCR2P%20Report%20--ACABQ%20and%20fifth%20Committee%20negotiations%20on%20the%20Joint%20Office.pdf>.
- 3 United Nations, *Statement attributed to the UN Secretary-General's Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect on the Situation in Côte d'Ivoire*, 19 January 2011, available at <http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/adviser/pdf/OSAPG,%20Special%20Advisers%20Statement%20on%20Cote%20d%27Ivoire,%2019%20Jan%202011.pdf>. This reference to divisive rhetoric is one of the dynamic factors listed in the Office's Analytical Framework (established in 2009), which serves as the basis for the Office's determination of whether the risk of genocide exist in a particular state.
- 4 United Nations, *UN Secretary-General Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Francis Deng, and Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect, Edward Luck, on the Situation in Libya*, 22 February 2011, available at <http://www.un.org/en/prevent-genocide/adviser/pdf/OSAPG,%20Special%20Advisers%20Statement%20on%20Libya,%2022%20February%202011.pdf>.