The Atrocity Prevention Board
Q & A by the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect

What is the Atrocity Prevention Board (APB)?
In 2012, the Obama Administration established the Atrocity Prevention Board, an inter-agency panel convened by the National Security Council and comprised of senior representatives of the:

- Departments of State, Defense, Treasury, Justice, and Homeland Security
- Joint Staff
- US Mission to the United Nations
- National Security Staff
- Office of the Director of National Intelligence
- Central Intelligence Agency
- Office of the Vice President
- US Agency for International Development (USAID)

What does the APB do?
The APB searches throughout the world for early warning signs and signals of atrocities and potential risks of mass atrocities.

- It seeks to assist existing prevention efforts or initiate new measures to guarantee that early warning and phased action are timely and appropriately attended to by governments.

The APB meets monthly to assess threats and develop tools and processes that can prevent atrocities or stop or mitigate ongoing atrocities.

What Important Events in History have affected the Development of the APB?
- 1995: Genocide in Rwanda
- 1998: States historically responsible for crimes in the world sign the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court
- 11 September 2001: Attack on the Twin Towers in New York City
- 2003: US President Bush announces the APB to the American people
- 2010: The APB is created under the auspices of the Atrocity Prevention and Protection Working Group (APPG), Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL), and others

How does the APB help the United States in fulfilling its RtoP?
The APB helps to:
- improve early warning mechanisms
- develop early warning programs to address warnings from civil society and international organizations
- deny impunity to perpetrators and enhance accountability and seeking justice for survivors of human rights abuses in the US and abroad
- ensure that the US government is acting at all levels of its diplomatic efforts to prevent mass atrocities

How can Civil Society work with the APB to Prevent Atrocities?
- Civil society personnel can serve in mediation, negotiation, and dispute resolution roles as well as post-atrocity reconstruction and reconciliation processes.

- Civil society can advocate for the inclusion of a mechanism for civil society in the prevention process.

- Civil society can engage in the prevention process in order to provide feedback on what is working and what is not.

- Civil society can ensure that the APB can work in concert with its work through the lenses of many presidential administration.

How can the APB be improved?
Throughout its brief history, the APB has faced criticisms and accused many member states of the International Criminal Court of lacking the US’s commitment to preventing mass atrocities. As a result, the APB has faced criticism from some member states, including the US, who have expressed concerns about the role of the APB in the broader system of international law.

- The APB’s role in preventing mass atrocities is limited by the current framework of international law and the ability of states to act on their own.

- The APB’s effectiveness is contingent on the cooperation and commitment of states to prevent mass atrocities.

- The APB’s mandate needs to be strengthened and expanded to be more effective in preventing mass atrocities.

What is the Genocide and Atrocity Prevention Act and how would it help the APB?
US lawmakers introduced the Genocide and Atrocity Prevention Act in Congress in February 2016 in an effort to address the limitations of the APB’s current mandates. If approved, the legislation would:

- Authorize the APB to coordinate and direct US support efforts on early prevention of atrocities as essential to the US national security strategy
- Maintain the current inter-agency framework and therefore also the engagement of the federal government’s attention
- Deepen the APB’s engagement with Congress and its leadership
- Fully authorize funding through the Complex Crisis Fund for atrocities prevention
- Provide training for Foreign Service Officers, helping not only in the early identification of atrocities but also in understanding the root causes

The Act would provide important support to the Department of the National Intelligence with an annual review of critical countries to ensure the APB and its prevention efforts are on track with the threats of the situations on the ground that they are meant to de-escalate and prevent.