

Action Paralysis

by Ellen J. Kennedy, Ph.D., Executive Director

Governor Mark Dayton said recently, “This is a hard time for human rights. Are we going to stand back or are we going to stand up?”

Of course we’re going to stand up.

But stand up for what?

Every morning I wonder what the day’s news will bring: which human right will be abridged, which group of people will be increasingly marginalized, which effort at global peace and justice will be at gravest risk of being dismantled.

What will I do today, I think; which issue needs attention most desperately?

Lack of access to health care. Poverty. Violence against women. Hunger. Genocides on three continents. Denial of women’s reproductive rights. Child soldiers. Sex trafficking. Corruption, political instability, and widening economic inequality. Climate change. Xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and anti-Muslimism. The worst refugee crisis in world history. Racial inequities in housing, education, and the law. Unequal treatment of those who identify as LGBTQ. Denial of access to voting. The list is endless, and rights that were so hard-won only yesterday might be gone tomorrow.

The problems are local and global, inter-connected and complex. If we think about that long list, we can become paralyzed in a cycle of rage, despair, fear, and inaction. So how do we move forward?

For me, it’s simple. I think about William Proxmire, the late senator from Wisconsin.

The Convention on the Punishment and Prevention of the Crime of Genocide was passed in the United Nations in 1945. In the mid-1960s, the US still hadn’t ratified it, a process that requires 67 ‘yes’ votes in the U.S. Senate. Sen. Proxmire took on the task of getting it ratified, something he assumed would be easily accomplished.

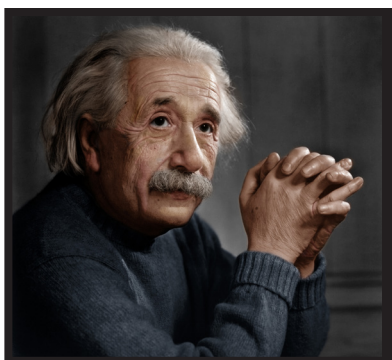
He gave 3,211 speeches on the floor of the Senate, a speech a day for 19 years, every one of them unique, until the Convention was finally ratified in 1988— forty years after its ratification by the UN.

Senator Proxmire kept standing up.

Imagine that. All those speeches, all those years – and he didn’t give up. We can’t give up, either. Pick your issue. Stand up. And keep standing up, just like Senator Proxmire.



Senator William Proxmire



The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them without doing anything.

-Albert Einstein

World Without Genocide, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, **educates** to raise awareness about past and current conflicts and **advocates** at local, state, and national levels for policies and legislation to protect innocent people, prevent genocide, prosecute perpetrators, and remember those whose lives have been affected by genocide.

Collective Trauma

The Southern Poverty Law Center reported more than a thousand hate incidents in the first few weeks after the election. Immigrant and refugee youth are taunted at school and told they'll be sent 'back.' Blacks, Muslims, Jews, people who identify as LGBTQ, and women are threatened and harassed.

There is a collective sense of trauma over this shift in our moral order. Even people who are typically stoical and unemotional are consumed with anxiety, depression, emotional exhaustion, sadness, and fear.

But it is necessary to go forward with energy and conviction in this challenging time. At the individual level, there are self-care recommendations for exercise, meditation, healthy eating, connecting with friends, and disconnecting from the news for a while.

Because the sense of trauma is collective, the response ultimately must be collective as well – to organize, advocate, and get engaged. Begin with your local city. See important initiatives at <http://worldwithoutgenocide.org/advocacy> that passed in Minneapolis recently to stand up against a national registry and to protect school youth from checks into their immigration status. The first steps start in our own neighborhoods.

Preventing Atrocities

Dr. Scott Straus, Fellow at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, spoke at World Without Genocide on December 6. The talk was a special commemoration of the signing of the UN Convention on the Punishment and Prevention of the Crime of Genocide, which occurred on December 9, 1948.

Dr. Straus highlighted major steps that the US and global organizations have taken in recent years to prevent genocides and other mass atrocities. He was cautiously optimistic that, even in the face of the ongoing tragedies in Iraq, Syria, Burma, and South Sudan, the 'toolbox' has expanded to include more non-military strategies.

The strategies include encouraging power-sharing among rival groups; decreasing economic inequality, increasing economic growth, and increasing equality and access to education and to the law; increasing the legitimacy of state institutions, holding leaders accountable, and ending impunity for their actions; enhancing democracy and protecting human rights and pluralism; and ratifying critical international human rights treaties, such as the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Additional strategies include ensuring civilian control over the military; and training domestic police on human rights and appropriate use of force. In a military context, his recommendations included enhancing peacekeeping training and missions and providing greater protection for civilians.

At a global level, he urged expansion of atrocity prevention representatives and increased resources to existing institutions such as the UN Office of Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect.

Dr. Straus expressed some concern for ongoing American engagement in atrocity prevention in today's climate of increasing isolationism. We join him in this concern and urge our public to continue advocacy on this issue of moral and political importance.



Scott Straus, Ph.D. (center) with Michelle Johnson (left) and Rachel Carlson, J.D., Benjamin B. Ferencz Fellows in Human Rights and Law.

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Youth for Human Rights

by Christina Meyer, Summer Institute Participant, 2013-2016
Student, Barnard College, New York

I attended the UN Human Rights Summit for Youth in New York City from August 25-27. I had my first taste of what working at the UN could be like. I experienced inspiration and innovation listening to global leaders such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Prince Bright Akinola, president of the African Youth Organization.

I found that personal conversations were more important than high-profile speakers. I became good friends with a group of four fellow students, each from a different continent. We discussed human rights abuses in our countries: the US, France, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Colombia, and the Philippines. Our lunches and dinners were invaluable experiences as I developed a more international perspective on global issues such as Brexit, LGBTQ+ rights, drug wars, anti-immigration policies, the Zika virus, and AIDS. These discussions created an important perspective on international human rights, but I had not found many solution-based ideas until I met Augustine Brian.

Augustine Brian explained how he managed to reduce police violence significantly in his native Papua New Guinea. Years ago, Brian was brutally beaten by the police for staying out a few minutes after curfew. He wanted to respond and discovered the text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights online. Brian went back to the police station and explained that they had violated his human rights. To his surprise, the police apologized to him and asked for his forgiveness. Brian said that he would forgive them if they apologized to the other thousands whom the police had brutalized. The police apologized and implemented human rights education in their police training program.

Brian's story caused me to recall attending the Minnesota funeral of Philando Castille earlier this summer. Mr. Castille was shot and killed during a routine traffic stop. I saw the distrust between the police and mourners. Trust needs to be re-established, and human rights education for police officers might be a good start.



Christina Meyer

In New York, I have been working with Columbia University students to create a chapter of the GenUN program. This is a national initiative to engage youth around a UN issue. We are working to improve police and community relations with the All Stars Project, a program fostering relationships between inner-city youth and New York Police Department officers. Additionally, we hope to get New York City support for several UN conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The road to advancing human rights in New York and in Minnesota will be long and arduous. But, as I learned at the UN Human Rights Summit, if my peers could manage to create change everywhere from Papua New Guinea to Cameroon to Canada, I should be able to do the same here.



Christina Meyer, second from the right with representatives from St. Vincent and the Grenadines, France, the Phillipines, and Colombia.

Fall Photos



Exhibit in Red Wing, MN with local high school students, Emily Grobelny, Program and Operations Coordinator (back left), and Marilyn Olson (front left), Red Wing Human Rights Commission member.



Benjamin B. Ferencz Fellows (left to right) Victoria Dutcher and Jessica Grady with representatives from Yangon Law School in Yangon, Burma/Myanmar.



Dr. Fredrich Kustaa (center), a Namibian Herero, with Ellen Kennedy (left), and Rachel Carlson (right), Board Member and Benjamin B. Ferencz Fellow in Human Rights and Law at a program about the 1904 genocide of the Herero.



Benjamin B. Ferencz Fellows (right to left) Shannon Jankowski, Sarah Schmidt Erickson, Amanda McAllister, and Michelle Johnson with Ellen Kennedy, at the International Criminal Court's annual Assembly of State Parties in The Hague, Netherlands.



Ellen Kennedy, (far left), Emily Grobelny, Program and Operations Coordinator (far right) at a reunion for alumni of the Summer Institute for High School and College Students.



Fred Amram, Holocaust survivor, with Ellen Kennedy, at his talk about his new memoir, *We're in America Now*.

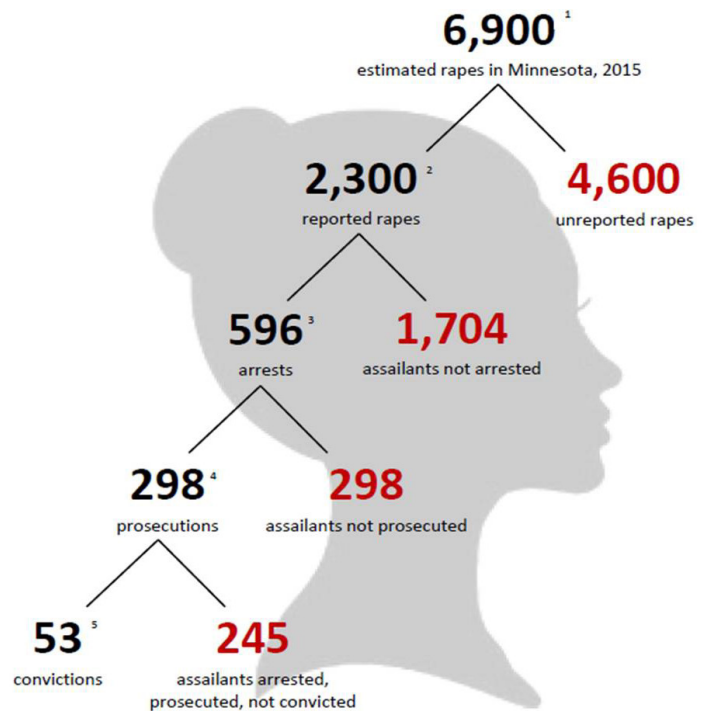
Ending the Rape Kit Backlog

A sexual assault evidence collection kit, or a rape kit, is the DNA evidence collected from a medical examination after an assault. This evidence is entered into a national database to help prosecute perpetrators. Most states have no laws about procedures for storing and testing rape kits after they have been collected. There is now a backlog of over 400,000 untested kits across the country.

Several states and cities have passed laws that mandate the testing of backlogged rape kits and provide deadlines for the submission of newly-collected kits. Their results have been remarkable. Thousands of rapists have been convicted and thousands of cold cases solved. Testing has also revealed the prevalence of serial offenders. Around 25% of rapists will go on to commit another reported rape. Testing kits prevents rape by identifying assailants before they can attack again.

Minnesota has almost 3,500 untested kits. To learn more see <http://worldwithoutgenocide.org/advocacy/rape-kit-reform>

RAPISTS GO FREE IN MINNESOTA



6,847 RAPES NEVER BROUGHT TO JUSTICE.

Celebrating Upstanders

Each year we honor an outstanding individual whose work has addressed some of the most serious human rights violations in the world. This year, with our focus on the issue of violence against women, we are awarding our 'Outstanding Upstander' award to Magistrate Judge Peggy Kuo.

From 1998 to 2002, Judge Kuo prosecuted war crimes and crimes against humanity at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Judge Kuo was one of four prosecutors for the Foča 'rape camp' trial. In July 1992, Foča, a town in Bosnia, was overrun by Serb paramilitary forces. They took the women and girls captive in various locations throughout the town and subjected them to rape and sexual violence over a period of many months. Kuo and her colleagues prosecuted three of the Serb leaders. The men were found guilty and convicted of crimes against humanity for their use of sexual violence. This was the first time that sexual enslavement was labeled as a crime against humanity.

Today, Judge Kuo serves as a federal magistrate judge in the Eastern District of New York. She is the first Taiwan-born federal judge in the United States.

Join us in celebrating this achievement in international law and in ending impunity for perpetrators of violence against women. She will be honored at our annual champagne and dessert gala on May 8, 2017 at The Woman's Club, 410 Oak Street, Minneapolis, MN.

See <http://worldwithoutgenocide.org/events-and-programs/a-world-of-upstanders/peggy-kuo-2017>





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SPRING 2017 EVENTS

- Thursday,
February
16** *Human Rights in Burma/Myanmar: Religious Prosecution, Economic Sanctions, and a New Political Landscape*
Jessica Grady, Victoria Dutcher, and Nou Her
Benjamin B. Ferencz Fellows in Human Rights and Law
Kelley Board Room, Mitchell Hamline School of Law
- Tuesday,
February
21** *Challenging Hate, Building Community: Film "The Letter: An American Town and the 'Somali Invasion'"*
Sponsored by Edina Citizens' Human Rights Committee.
Co-sponsored by World Without Genocide
Free and open to the public. For location, check our website.
- Wednesday,
March
22** *The International Criminal Court: Preventing Cultural Genocide and Destruction of Peoples*
Michelle Johnson, Amanda McAllister, Sarah Schmidt Erickson, and Shannon Jankowski
Benjamin B. Ferencz Fellows in Human Rights and Law
Kelley Board Room, Mitchell Hamline School of Law
- Wednesday,
April
26** *A Survivor Speaks: Commemorating Holocaust Remembrance Day*
Fred Amram, Holocaust Survivor
Auditorium, Mitchell Hamline School of Law

Open to the public. No reservations necessary.
\$10 general public. \$5 students and seniors. Free to Mitchell Hamline students.
CLE credits (pending). 2 'clock hours' for educators.