Amidah is Hebrew for ‘standing up.’ It refers to both a prayer that is said while standing – and to people who stood up during the Holocaust to resist injustice.

At World Without Genocide, we urge people to stand up, to be ‘upstanders’ for justice, to wage the good battles for people who are marginalized and at risk of violence – racial, religious, and ethnic minorities; members of the LGBTQ community; the disabled, the disadvantaged, the forgotten, and the voiceless.

We suggest action steps from the simple to the complex. That is our mission. That is how we envision bringing about a world without genocide, a world with peace and equality, and a world without hate and discrimination.

There is now scientific evidence that standing up is also good for your health.

According to Dr. Dhruv Khullar (New York Times, January 1, 2018), only about a quarter of Americans say they have a clear sense of purpose and of what makes their lives meaningful. Research suggests that purpose is important for a meaningful life — and also for a healthy life.

The past few years have had a devastating effect on rates of depression, anxiety, intra-familial and gender-based violence, and suicide in the US. Having purpose is linked to improved and positive health outcomes. Having purpose, Dr. Khullar suggests, is a “modifiable state: Purpose can be honed through strategies that help us engage in meaningful activities and behaviors.”

“Purpose and meaning are connected to what researchers call eudaimonic well-being,” Dr. Khullar says. This is distinct from, and sometimes inversely related to, happiness, or hedonic well-being. Eudaimonic well-being, or meaningfulness, is a deeper, more durable state, than happiness, which is often superficial or transient.

People with lives of purpose live longer; have better sleep, fewer strokes and heart attacks; and they have a lower risk of dementia, disability and premature death.

In this issue, seven people share their reasons for standing up. They write about issues that provide deep meaning and significance in their lives: an end to genocide and war in one’s homeland; abolishing child slavery; ending racial injustice in voting disenfranchisement; advocating for women’s equality; and remembering those who are erased in history.

These writers all have deep purpose in the work that they do.

Join us. Stand up. Contact us for opportunities to engage locally, nationally, and globally. It will be good for your health – and for the world.
Slavery is illegal and universally-condemned, and when the enslaved are children, it is particularly horrific.

I witnessed child slavery in 1988. I went to the “carpet belt” in Varanasi, India to investigate reports of enslaved children forced to weave hand-knotted carpets that are bought by the world’s wealthy.

I posed as a carpet dealer. I was given access to loom sheds filled with young children weaving away. Some children were actually chained in place. I was paralyzed in despair. I was there to investigate child slavery, and I was staring into the terrified eyes of hungry children, thrown away by someone they probably loved, and left to spend their childhoods working to avoid starvation and beatings.

My reaction was rage. I wanted to lash out, rescue the children, and punish the men in charge.

My rage began in grade school. I was the kid who rescued the outcast being bullied on the bus or getting pummeled by a gang of cowards behind the bleachers after school. The words I thought then, “Who would do that to another person?” echoed in my mind as I saw this crime against children carried out on a whole different level.

When I was a child following my instincts, I knew what to do - rescue the kid! Here, in that carpet factory, I knew that an emotional reaction would get me dragged out by men who were willing to enslave children – and probably hurt me as well.

I asked the man in charge why the workers were children. He explained that children’s small, nimble fingers were perfect to make the tiny knots used in the most exquisite carpets. It took everything I had not to grab him and chain him to the loom.

I stared at this archetype of the worst in humans. He represented the enforcer on a slave ship or the cotton planation overseer who whipped his slaves, raped the women, and sold their offspring. This was 1988 and he was still with us.

I knew when I left the carpet shed, simmering with rage, that I was no longer investigating. I was on a mission to save children.

I always believed that I reacted like any person would, but I’ve met too many people who are complicit in these global economic crimes or they just don’t care. I can’t understand this, but I’ve built a community of people who share my mission.

I teamed up with Nobel Laureate Kailash Satyarthi and helped implement his brainchild, a program called Goodweave, that eventually regulated the carpet industry. We educated consumers about endemic child labor in carpet weaving and offered a system to monitor, certify, and label carpets made without child labor. Participants pay for independent monitoring and rehabilitation programs for the children who are freed. We have rescued, educated, and rehabilitated thousands of former carpet slaves who now enjoy their childhoods.

This showed us that consumer power was critical in ending child slavery. We had other successful campaigns, including the Foul Ball campaign that stopped child labor sewing soccer balls in Pakistan and reduced child labor in garment and footwear production.

However, the tough cases were the most common — multinational companies that used a component made with child labor that was hidden in a final consumer product, like chocolate. Much of the world’s cocoa is harvested by forced child labor in Cote D’Ivoire and Ghana. The big companies, including Nestle, Mars, and Hershey, know that their cocoa is harvested by children, but they deny responsibility.

I needed a different strategy. I began using legal cases to target corporate beneficiaries of products made by children. We currently have a case on behalf of eight formerly enslaved children against Nestle, Cargill, Mars, Hershey, Olam, Barry Callebaut, and Mondelez for knowingly benefitting from child slavery in their cocoa harvesting.

We also have a case against Apple, Tesla, Google, Dell, and Microsoft for using cobalt mined by forced child miners in DRC to make their batteries. We are going to stop these corporate titans.
I Ran and I Ran

By Chris Stark

Chris is the author of Carnival Lights, a recently-released novel about colonization, sex trafficking, and Ojibwe cultural resiliency and love, set in Minnesota. She is a survivor of child and teen sex trafficking. Her healing came about through reconnecting with her Indigenous ancestry and community. She is a member of the Board of Directors of World Without Genocide.

When I was a young child and the bad things began, I ran. I had no plan. I had no place or person to run toward. I simply ran. The abusive adults (almost entirely men) let me run for a short time. As I ran as fast as my chubby legs could go, they laughed. My fear and the fact that I was a few feet tall and unable to escape them or do anything to stop them, entertained them.

As the years went on, the abuse at home and in groups continued. I, and the other children and women they raped, were often laughed at as we were being hurt. If we fought back, as I did, our efforts were also laughed at until, suddenly, a switch flipped, and the abuser went from laughing to rage at our audacity for resisting him.

Having your pain and helplessness be entertainment for those who are hurting you is an entirely different experience than being harmed in other ways. Sadism indicates the death of the sadist’s spirit, and it can annihilate the victim’s spirit and will to live. As a child, I witnessed the destruction of others. Sometimes it was swift and sometimes it took years. I was powerless to stop the men who chose to rape and sell women and children.

In my late teens, I left them for good.

My adult life has been about speaking the truth and fighting back by organizing, writing, doing research, and speaking about the trafficking of Native communities. I’m no longer powerless. My hope is that my work helps others heal and escape. It builds bridges of empathy to those who do not know about the organized rape of women and children in this country, which began when Columbus invaded what we now call the Caribbean.

People often ask me when I began standing up or speaking out as an adult. The truth is, my resistance began when I was old enough to run.

Being A Girl

By Priscilla Hagerman

Priscilla is a senior at the University of Minnesota majoring in Global Studies. She is an intern at World Without Genocide and she has been involved in CEDAW campaigns for the past year.

When I was growing up, my parents were clear that being a girl was not something that could limit me. I could do anything I set my mind to, regardless of what the gender norms were. If my brother learned how to build a fire or change a tire, so did I. If I learned how to sew or bake, so did he.

But my parents’ efforts couldn’t mask the sexism I’ve experienced. Their efforts couldn’t prevent the uneasiness I feel walking home from class late at night. I have to face down other people’s assumptions that I can’t do certain things and confront male classmates who treat me like I’m not as smart as they are. My parents did, however, prepare me to expect these things, which no parent should have to do, but they also taught me to stand up for my beliefs.

The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is known as the bill of rights for women. I’ve worked on the Cities for CEDAW movement, an effort to get 100 cities across the US to support CEDAW and to call on Congress to finally ratify it.

I was part of World Without Genocide’s recent successful campaigns in Northfield, MN and Appleton, WI. I was interviewed by the Minnesota Daily about my work on CEDAW and was thrilled to be able to share the importance of ratifying CEDAW. I spoke at events to advocate for CEDAW. Seeing these resolutions passed gives me hope for a future where women and girls are treated with the respect and dignity that we deserve.

Ratifying CEDAW would signal that the US cares about women’s rights, that my rights are valued just as much as any man’s rights. Getting support locally shows me that people care about the issues my parents taught me to stand up for. Across cities and towns in America – and in Minnesota – people want equal rights for women. Congress needs to agree by ratifying CEDAW.

Six countries on the planet haven’t ratified CEDAW:
Sudan, Somalia, Iran, Palau, Tonga – and the United States.
The Armenian Genocide killed 1.5 million Armenians.
• The Holocaust killed 6 million Jews.
• The Rwandan Genocide killed 800,000 Tutsis.

These better-known genocides have been memorialized around the world. In some cases, survivors and descendants have been able to seek partial compensation, and perpetrating countries have acknowledged their complicity. While it is far from enough, the world remembers and mourns those who were killed.

There is, however, a subset of genocide victims who are excluded from most history. During the Armenian Genocide, Greeks and Assyrians were also slaughtered.

Two decades before the Rwandan Genocide, Hutus were massacred in neighboring Burundi.

The Circassians of the Northern Caucasus, Kurds in Iraq, Hazaras in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Yazidis in Iraq, and Hmong in Laos have been victims of genocide. Sadly, they are forgotten alongside many other groups. Historical amnesia, whether deliberate or accidental, is more often the rule than the exception in cases of mass murder.

I spent much of this summer researching these ‘forgotten genocides’ at World Without Genocide. It is terrifying to me that entire groups – mothers, neighbors, community leaders, ambitious students, children who dream of changing the world—can simply be deleted from memory.

The stories of some groups are overshadowed by other genocides, wars, and atrocities. In some cases, victims are annihilated so thoroughly that few remain to tell the stories. In other cases, propaganda, discrimination, and campaigns of denial obscure the truth of the victims’ persecution.

Why is this important to me? A high school social studies teacher once told me, “When we fail to remember, we annihilate a group for a second time.” In other words, we let the victims of genocide die twice.

The first is a physical death, when they become collateral damage of humanity’s worst faults and ambitions. The second is a spiritual death, when they are deleted from the world’s memory as if they were never here. Those mothers, neighbors, religious leaders, ambitious students, children who dream of changing the world… it becomes as if their lives never mattered, their trauma was insignificant.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is premised on the assumption that every life matters equally and unquestionably. If this is true, everyone must have a right to be remembered.

This is why I was attracted to human rights work. It is crucial to research, read, and re-tell the stories of under-represented groups. I refuse to let their murders be insignificant.

I want everyone to learn more about these lesser-known narratives and under-represented atrocities. Stand up to remember the victims of genocide.

FORGOTTEN VICTIMS
by Amalie Wilkinson

Amalie is a second-year student at the University of Toronto. She was an intern at World Without Genocide, where she prepared case studies and other materials for students and educators. She is deeply concerned about the intersection between climate crises and genocide.

Standing up for the Legacy of Music
by Daniel Choma

Daniel Choma has an independent record label, Run Ruby Red Records, and he is a composer and songwriter. He is a student at Mitchell Hamline School of Law and an intern for the City of Saint Paul’s Human Rights and Equal Employment Opportunity Department. He recently worked on a World Without Genocide amicus brief for a case on racial disparities in felon disenfranchisement.

Roma, Jehovah’s Witnesses, individuals with disabilities, the LGBTQ+ community, and others were killed during the Holocaust.

I’ve spent my entire adult life reinventing myself. It’s a prerequisite for artists, really: like a phoenix reborn, artists are perpetually re-introducing themselves to the community. Author Octavia Butler had it right: God is change. Redemption is the creative necessity of social evolution, a reminder of the beauty of the human condition.

This redemption of creativity is not something I have been able to do alone. I am lucky to be a part of a greater community that encouraged me to claim my political autonomy, pushing me into organizing, activism, and finally to law school.

However, Minnesota does not give this same right to creative redemption to everyone. This is why I fight for political rights for the formerly incarcerated. Felony disenfranchisement law has an overwhelmingly negative impact on people of color—especially black people. Considering that I carry a debt towards black people for the freedom their music taught my soul, this injustice is incongruent with my heart. My heart will not allow me to claim my redemption while the state sidelines the very community that taught me to be reborn.

Everyone in my community should have the right to be reborn into a new creativity. We must sing back the ghost of Frederick Douglass dancing. Only then will we be free.
Genocide is a vicious cycle that repeats over and over again. We study past genocides, and we mourn the lives lost, yet we fail to see and prevent the crises happening right now. One of the most frequent questions I hear from students studying mass atrocities is “How did the world let this happen in the first place?” The irony is that while we study genocide as a monstrosity of the past, the same atrocities take place in the present. Generations later, the same question is always repeated.

When the Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh conflict erupted again with the heaviest clashes in years on September 27, 2020, it was hard to ignore the looming possibility of another Armenian genocide. As an Armenian from Artsakh, I always believed, or rather hoped, that there could be a peaceful solution to the conflict. I wanted to believe that one day I could live under a blue sky without being afraid of the planes overhead.

No matter how heartbreaking it was to lose so many friends and loved ones and to know that I would never again be able to see my home and the land that nurtured me, I believe in a future of peace for both Armenians and Azeris. I stand for and I advocate for this vision every day because I cannot live my life knowing another generation of children will see death and destruction instead of peace. In no universe should a child spend nights not knowing if their parents are alive. In no world should a child be punished and scarred for life just because of who they are.

I am a child of a genocide and a war that was never over. While we must remember and honor the millions of people killed during past genocides, I am encouraging you to look around. There are lives that can be still saved, genocides that can be prevented, and a vicious cycle that can be broken.

There is much work to be done.

Genocide: Over and Over Again
by Tika Khachatryan

Tika is the Communications and Outreach Director at World Without Genocide. She is a recent graduate of St. Olaf College, where she majored in international relations and political science. She has been involved in human rights for many years, including founding a human rights organization while she was in high school. She grew up amidst the ongoing conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

“WE SHARE THE DREAM”

By Senator Sandy Pappas

Sen. Pappas, former President of the Minnesota Senate, is in the Minnesota legislature for more than thirty years. She has been an iconic advocate of women’s rights locally and globally, including at the United Nations Council on the Status of Women. She is the founder and executive director of Forward Global Women, which advances women’s equality in peace-building throughout the Middle East and North Africa. She is the past chair of the Board of Directors of World Without Genocide.

About 20 years ago, Samantha Power, former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations and then a journalist, used the word “upstander” to label the actions of people who intervene to prevent mass atrocities. An “upstander” is someone who recognizes when something is wrong and acts to make it right.

What leads a person to become an upstander?

As a teenager, I was moved by innate feelings of support for the underdog and public service.

My first recollection of concrete action as an adult was a small one in symbolism, but it still sticks with me today.

In the months after the 1968 assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the injustice of discrimination and the murder of its best-recognized opponent of racism gnawed at my heart.

I was 19 years old. I was living and working in a predominantly white working-class town.

As a small symbol of my feelings, I began to wear a little button that had a graphic promoting the equality of peoples. The button stated, “We Share the Dream.”

I was a cashier at a local grocery store. I put the button on my uniform.

When I got to work, my boss told me to take the button off. I took the button off, but I complained to my boyfriend’s mother. “Look,” she said, “When the boss says jump, you respond – how high.”

I didn’t agree. I decided to quit that job.

But when I called the Human Resources Department the next day to give notice, they pre-empted me by saying, “Oh, you’re the girl that used to work here.”

I became an Upstander on social justice at that moment. I am still renewed by my MLK button.

Amidah, stand up and resist injustice.
Afghanistan: Genocide, War Crimes, and the International Criminal Court
Sunday, October 24, 1:00-2:30 pm CT, Webinar
- Caitlin Schweiger, J.D., Benjamin B. Ferencz Fellow in Human Rights and Law, will discuss the current investigation at the International Criminal Court in The Hague, Netherlands, of crimes perpetrated in Afghanistan.
- Dr. Ellen Kennedy will discuss the situation for the Hazaras, an ethnoreligious minority in Afghanistan that has been targeted by violence labeled ‘genocide’ by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and other organizations.

Reservations by Oct. 23 at www.worldwithoutgenocide.org/afghanistan

Birth, Sex, and Abuse: Women and Children Under Nazi Rule
Wednesday, December 15, 2021, 7:00-9:00 pm CT, Webinar
- Dr. Beverley Chalmers is an award-winning author and scholar. She will speak about the sexual assault of children, who were abused by the Nazis, by their rescuers, and by their peers, and the many forms of sexual abuse of Jewish women in concentration camps.

Reservations by Dec. 14 at www.worldwithoutgenocide.org/women

Webinars are open to the public: $10 general public, $5 students and seniors, $25 for Minnesota lawyers seeking CLE credits; free for Mitchell Hamline students.

‘Clock hours’ are available for teachers, nurses, and social workers.

More information: admin@worldwithoutgenocide.org or call 952-693-5206