

Aiding the prevention of genocide in the Great Lakes Region of Africa



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The work of Sussex researcher Nigel Eltringham has contributed to the creation of a regional mechanism for the prevention of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide in the Great Lakes Region of Africa – the only mechanism of its kind in the world. By delivering training and facilitating regional and national workshops, drawing upon his research on the 1994 Rwandan genocide, he has contributed to the formation of a series of committees, co-ordination offices and programmes designed to prevent future genocide in this region.

Overview

In the last two decades, the African Great Lakes Region – which consists of the countries that surround the lakes of the East African Rift valley, including Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda – has experienced numerous episodes of genocide and mass atrocity. Most notably, in 1994, just under a million Rwandans (mostly Tutsis) were murdered in a genocide carried out by militia, elements of the army, often with participation of the local population. Repercussions of the Rwandan genocide led to conflict in neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo where more than 5 million people have died since 1996. Further conflicts have occurred in Uganda, the Darfur region of South Sudan and Kenya, leading to the deaths of

hundreds of thousands of people, the displacement of many millions, and, in the case of the Ugandan conflict, the abduction of up to 100,000 children.

In the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide, Nigel Eltringham (Senior Lecturer in Anthropology), conducted ethnographic research in Rwanda, among the Rwandan diaspora in Europe and at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), in order to examine the different ways in which people account for genocide. His research has enabled him to contribute to the creation of a regional mechanism for the prevention of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide in the Great Lakes region.

By concentrating on the discussions that took place in the aftermath of the atrocities, rather than on the actual dynamics of the genocide itself, Eltringham has enhanced our understanding of how mass atrocity can become cyclical and the way in which exclusionary discourse is reproduced. In response to the evolving political situation in Rwanda, he has published on the proscription of ethnic identity in the aftermath of the genocide, arguing that ordinary Rwandans need to be able to refer to a benign form of ethnicity in order to indicate a return to 'normality'. He also explored the ICTR as a form of 'historical-preservation technology' and how it can fulfil a dual purpose of determining individual guilt/innocence and establishing a historical record. In addition, he assessed the role of anthropology and history in trials through the testimony of expert witnesses.



Nigel Eltringham has participated in several training initiatives, using findings from his research on the Rwandan genocide to explain the characteristics of mass-atrocity crimes and how they can be prevented.

Eltringham's research has resisted reconstructing the Rwandan genocide as a historical event. Rather it maintains a dynamic relationship with how people try to account for the events of 1994. His work has contributed to theoretical and comparative research on the anthropology of violence, law, narrative and memorialisation, and makes practical contributions to the detection of, response to and prevention of mass atrocities.

Achieving impact

Under the auspices of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and the office of the UN Secretary General's Special Advisor for the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG), Eltringham's research has contributed to the development of early-warning mechanisms to prevent further genocide and mass-atrocity crimes in the Great Lakes Region, South Sudan and Kenya. This is the only mechanism of its kind in the world.

Since 2010, OSAPG has been working with the ICGLR – an intergovernmental organisation of 11 member states – to implement the 2006 Protocol for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity and all Forms of Discrimination. Eltringham

was invited to participate in training, regionally and nationally, where findings from his research on the Rwandan genocide were used to explain the characteristics of mass-atrocity crimes and how they can be prevented.

As a consultant-trainer for the OSAPG in July 2011 (Juba, South Sudan), Eltringham delivered a four-day knowledge-exchange programme on genocide prevention to civil-society representatives and government officials/military officers. He drew directly on his research on the Rwandan genocide and its aftermath, including findings on perpetrators' fantasies, paranoia, the use of euphemisms and dehumanisation, the use of history to claim victimhood, the dangers of collectivising guilt, and the role of international criminal justice. At the initiative of the Sudan Peace and Reconciliation Commission, in response to the workshop, the South Sudan Government established a national Conflict Early Warning and Response Unit in May 2012. South Sudan joined the ICGLR on 24 November 2012 and Eltringham returned to Juba in September 2013 to participate in the official launch and training of the South Sudan National Committee.

In February 2012, in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, Eltringham delivered genocide prevention training to the Regional Committee of the ICGLR with additional training on early-warning systems provided by Kenyan expert Raymond Kitevu. Following the training, the Regional Committee announced the creation of a co-ordination office at the ICGLR secretariat to analyse reports and mappings from member-states to enable early warning to the heads of state. Mr Nathan Byamukama, Secretary to the Regional Committee on Prevention of Genocide, stated that 'Having acknowledged the value of the training in its official communiqué of 8 February 2012, the members of the committee have continued to draw on Nigel's and Raymond's training as they continue their vital work of bringing an end to genocide and mass-atrocity crimes in the Great Lakes Region'.

At the same time, Eltringham worked with the Tanzanian National Committee and assisted in the creation of a 12-month work plan. With the increase in inter-religious

tension in Tanzania, including riots in Zanzibar in 2012 and the bombing of a church in Arusha in 2013, the Tanzanian National Committee held (2013–2014) seven regional Peace Forums, targeting religious leaders as an important group in building peace and social cohesion in Tanzania. Each region has formed a sub-committee that follows-up on issues raised and on the implementation of the recommendations. A National Dialogue is planned that will bring together the representatives of the regional sub-committees to deliberate a national strategy for the prevention of mass-atrocity crime.

Eltringham also delivered a two-day workshop on genocide prevention to the Kenyan National Committee (Naivasha, Kenya, August 2012) and assisted in the creation of a 12-month workplan for the Committee. Subsequently, the Kenyan National Committee announced the creation of a 'Public Awareness and Advocacy Programme on the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities'.

Future impact

Eltringham continues to work with the OSAPG and the ICGLR.

Funding and partnership

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Working with us

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For more on Dr Eltringham's research, visit: www.sussex.ac.uk/profiles/158813/research

For further information about research in this area, visit the Justice and Violence Research Centre: www.sussex.ac.uk/justice