

Meaningful World

The Association for Trauma
Outreach & Prevention (ATOP)

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United Nations International Day of Reflection on Genocide 7 April 2022

Samer Sabbour and Kokila Sharda



H.E Ambassador Mr. Claver Gatete

On 7 April 2022, a program for United Nations International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Rwandan Genocide was held at Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs. The event also commemorated the Ottoman-Turkish Genocide of Armenians, Greeks & Assyrians, and The Holocaust. Over 70 attendees were present in person, and another 50 participants joined via Zoom. The panel began with a candle lighting ceremony by Columbia University's Rwandan students of the African Development Group emphasizing the message of hope and honoring the victims of the genocide.

After this, Her Excellency, Ms. Amina J. Mohamed, Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations welcomed the attendees with an inspiring pre-recorded address, where she spoke on the importance of genocide awareness. In attendance was H.E. Mr. Claver Gatete, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Rwanda to the United Nations, who delivered one of the keynote presentations.

Mr. Gatete was asked several questions by the moderator. One of the most important questions he discussed highlighted the way in which Rwandans looked to achieve justice and reconciliation following the genocide. Mr. Gatete pointed out that the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, responsible for trying the perpetrators of the genocide was not an adequate tool for achieving reconciliation. Not only were its proceedings very time consuming and slow, but they also cost a considerable amount of money and resources. Mr. Gatete asserted that Rwanda could have benefitted from having access to the money and resources directly. Instead, Mr. Gatete emphasized that the Gacaca Courts or the “grass courts” were a far more effective means of achieving justice and reconciliation. In these courts, community leaders representing the victim and the perpetrators met in a public space in their community and subsequently resolved the grievances experienced. Because of the large number of perpetrators involved in the Rwandan Genocide, trying everyone would have taken more than a hundred years! These courts served as a way for communities and individuals to discuss their issues and work towards achieving a fair resolution. This is

particularly important because during the genocide, it was very common that neighbors and even family members would have killed one another thereby damaging relations in communities across the nation and traumatizing Rwandans across the country.

Another important point mentioned in the presentation was that of generational trauma. Following his discussion, Dr. Kalayjian asked Mr. Gatete what measures have been taken to address the psychological trauma caused by the Rwandan Genocide. Dr. Ani referenced the work Meaningfulworld had done in the immediate aftermath of the genocide in 1994 and noted the significant lack of mental health resources in the country during that time. Mr. Gatete gladly shared that there has been a significant increase in the number of mental health counselors in Rwanda since the genocide, and that overall, Rwanda has committed significant resources to UN Peacekeeping operations as a commitment to ensure that genocide never reoccurs in the country. Further, he emphasized the importance of education on combatting hate and ensuring that future generations remain informed about the horrors of the genocide. The Ambassador invited Meaningfulworld to return to Rwanda. Following the Q&A session, ATOP team members Samer Sabbour and Kokila Sharda presented Mr. Gatete with a gift, including Dr. Kalayjian's book *Forget Me Not*.



Moderator Saumya Kshtriya, Dr. Kalayjian, and Professor Nash- Marshall

Ms. Consolée Nishimwe, a survivor of the Genocide, shared her personal experiences suffered through the genocide. She recalled the tragic murders of her family members, her own brutal attacks and the trauma of having to constantly flee and hide in the rain and mud, after being turned away by people refusing to take her and her family to hid them in their homes. The first lesson she imparts to people is to break their silence and not be an upstander.



Candle lighting ceremony led by Columbia University's students

She stated that whenever she had come across individuals denying the severity or existence of the genocide, her wounds would re-open. It is thus important to combat misinformation and hate and ensure that future generations remain aware of the genocide in honor of those killed during those atrocities.

After Ms. Nishimwe's presentation, Dr. Kalayjian presented on the Ottoman-Turkish Genocide of Armenians. She gave an overview of a century of Genocides starting with slavery, indigenous people, the Genocide of Armenians, the Holocaust, Cambodian Genocide, Rwandan, Palestinian suffering, Genocide in Sudan, 9/11 terrorism, and the present violence



ATOP Meaningfulworld Team members: Saumya Kshtriya, Lorraine Simmons, Dr. Ani, Samer Sabbour, and Kokila Sharda

in Artsakh, Armenia, and Ukraine. She discussed the history of the Ottoman-Turkish Genocide and historical and present-day efforts of the Turkish government to deny the Genocide. In addition, she shed light on the ongoing bullying that takes place amongst nations, even at the United Nations. She shared that despite repeated threats to her life and intimidation by the Turkish government due to her efforts to shed light on the Ottoman-Turkish Genocide, Dr. Kalayjian still led a humanitarian mission to Turkey in 1999. The best way to combat hate is not with more hate, but with compassion and education. Handouts were distributed to the audience featuring information on the *7-Step Integrative Healing Model* and the work that ATOP has done around the world. Dr. Kalayjian concluded sharing multiple strategies that ATOP Meaningfulworld shares freely, such as weekly support groups, educational webinars, internships, fellowships, various workshops, and humanitarian missions.

ATOP panel member, Prof. Siobhan Nash-Marshall, professor at Manhattanville College and founder of a school in Artsakh, spoke briefly about the war in Nagorno-Karabakh and the toll it has taken on the local population. She delivered a monologue about the anxieties experienced by those in the city because of the attacks waged by Azerbaijan. Her monologue focused on the current threat under which Armenians live in the Caucasus, emphasizing the commonalities between the continuing Armenian Genocide – which is presently targeting the Artsakh Armenian population – and the Rwandan Genocide and indicating that “the Truth shall set us free.” While she spoke, she focused her compassionate attention on Ms. Consolée Nishimwe to connect with her and give her support. Prof. Nash-Marshall urged the audience to pray and remain vocal about their opposition to violence and injustice globally and reminded everyone of the importance to keep striving for the legacy of past and future generations. Armenians in Artsakh have had no acknowledgment, have not been given reparations, nor enjoyed world acknowledgment that Holocaust survivors had.

The last panel discussed the Holocaust and featured presentations by Anna Ray-Jones, Bonnie Ray Glogover & Ms. Rhonda Fink-Whitman. All three panelists presented on their

efforts to educate the public about the Holocaust and keep the legacy of the Holocaust



Audience members listening to Mr. Gatete.

survivors alive. Anna is a playwright who read excerpts from her book documenting the lives of people in the ghettos of Europe. They are inspired by the personal memoirs and experiences of Holocaust survivors and shed light on the brutality of the Nazi regime as well as the day-to-day conditions within the ghettos. Bonnie Ray Glogover shared her efforts to get Holocaust Remembrance Day enacted as an official day of commemoration after successfully lobbying the U.S. House of Representatives and President Bill Clinton. Rhonda-Fink Whitman presented on her efforts to have Holocaust education mandated in several states. She has assisted with efforts to make Holocaust education mandatory in 20 states and hopes to get 5 states to mandate it in their curriculums this year.

Overall, the panel was extremely successful. Special gratitude to His Excellency, Mr. Gatete, Moderator Saumya Kshtriya, Professor Daniel Naujoks, and all panelists and audience members for their insightful contributions. Special gratitude to the Co-Sponsors: The School of International and Public Affairs' International Organizations and UN studies Director, Prof. Naujoks; the African Development Groups, President Didace Irafasha; the United Nations Association of the United States of America, Founding President, Krystal Cruz, who was also the organizer; with support and solidarity from ATOP Meaningfulworld's President Dr. Ani Kalayjian, and the Institute for the Study of Human Rights at Columbia University.

Please join us for our next monthly workshop *Disaster Relief and Meaning-Making* on 30 April via hybrid.

Founded in 1990, the Association for Trauma Outreach & Prevention (ATOP) Meaningfulworld, charitable organization affiliated with the United Nations Dept. of Public Information, has achieved international recognition as a leader in training humanitarian outreach professionals as well as responding to two and a half decades of global and local disasters. ATOP is committed to health, justice, peace, transformation and global education promoting state-of-the-art scientific theory on peace, forgiveness, consciousness research, internship, and the development of technical skills to train mental health professionals, teachers, psychologists, art therapists, nutritionists, alternative medicine practitioners, clergy, nurses, mediators, interfaith ministers, and lay persons committed to service of the self and humanity. Meaningfulworld Humanitarian Outreach Teams have helped rehabilitate survivors from over 48 countries and 26 states in USA, making a daily difference in people's lives and helping to transform tragedy and trauma into healing and meaning-making through post-trauma growth, resilience, emotional intelligence, mindfulness, mind-body-eco-spirit health, visionary leadership, empowerment, artful collaborations, and establishing Peace & Forgiveness Gardens to create a new and Meaningfulworld view. We work locally and globally in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, the Middle East, The Caucasus, Europe, and South and North America.

Our Motto: When one helps another, BOTH become stronger