



Association for Trauma Outreach and Prevention (ATOP)

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Genocide Prevention, upholding United Nations Human Rights Declaration and SDG's

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What is a genocide? How has genocide impacted generations of people? How can we work to prevent genocide from happening and raise awareness for it? On 27 April 2024, Fordham University at Lincoln Center was the venue for a profoundly impactful workshop titled "Genocide Prevention, Upholding United Nations Human Rights Declaration and SDGs," organized by the Association for Trauma Outreach and Prevention (ATOP) MeaningfulWorld. The event was designed to delve into the mechanisms of genocide and explore practical strategies for educating and preventing such atrocities in the future. It aligned closely with multiple Sustainable Development Goals, emphasizing goals 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, 13, 16, and 17, underscoring a comprehensive approach towards fostering peace, justice, and strong institutions.

The workshop opened with a warm reception from Andrew Dolinar, Vice President of ATOP MeaningfulWorld, who welcomed the attendees. Following this, Dr. Ani Kalayjian, President of the organization, led a moment of silence, paying respects to the memory of genocide victims. This somber tribute set a reflective tone for the discussions unfolding throughout the day.

Dr. Allison Dobrick, from the William Paterson University Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, took the stage to highlight the essential role of education in genocide prevention. Starting from an early age, Dr. Dobrick argued for the integration of these critical lessons into school curricula nationwide, stressing the disturbing question, "Why, despite global awareness and historical evidence, does genocide persist in modern societies? Such as in Gaza?" This highlighted a gap between knowledge and action in human rights education.

The narrative deepened as Aida Zilelian-Silak, an author and first-generation Armenian-American, shared poignant personal experiences reflecting the emotional and cultural impacts of genocide on diaspora communities. Her moving story not only illustrated the deep scars left by such tragedies but also posed a crucial inquiry about the persistence of trauma across generations, enriching the discussions with personal insights and emotional depth. Musical interludes by Lee Tomboulian, who performed on the accordion, added a unique cultural dimension to the workshop. His family's history with the Armenian genocide provided a personal touch, bridging the past and present through the power of music and storytelling.



Harold Takooshian, a professor of psychology from Fordham University, then took the stage to address the importance of oral history. He discussed how it is essential to interview our family members and get a record of orally spoken history. Often, through these oral history interviews, we can gain vital information about our family's history.

Professor Ayda Erbal, ABD from New York University, expertly addressed the role of technology in preserving historical narratives. She discussed the challenges and opportunities presented by artificial intelligence and digital media in maintaining historical accuracy, raising critical questions about the ethical responsibilities involved in handling digital records of genocides.

As the workshop concluded, Dr. Kalayjian revisited the urgent need for vigilance and proactive measures against ongoing and potential genocides. She emphasized the importance of acknowledging and confronting denial, which often exacerbates the trauma experienced by communities. She said denial is the last stage of Genocide. Her parting questions challenged the audience to evaluate whether current educational curriculums were sufficiently teaching the lessons from past atrocities and what improvements were necessary to ensure that future generations could learn from and prevent historical violence.

The workshop, with its diverse speakers and rich content, had a lasting impact on the participants. An attendee shared a heartfelt testimony about the transformative experience of the seminar, highlighting how sharing traumatic and resilient life stories fostered a sense of community and understanding. They reflected on the rare energy and unity experienced during the event, resonating deeply with their journey of finding purpose through education and communal engagement.

Overall, the ATOP MeaningfulWorld workshop succeeded in instilling a renewed sense of duty and hope among its participants. It underscored that through education, reflection, and shared experiences, communities can collaborate effectively to prevent the horrors of genocide and build a more empathetic and just world.

Throughout the event, the theme "**When one helps another, BOTH become stronger**" resonated, highlighting the communal and supportive approach advocated by ATOP MeaningfulWorld. The workshop not only educated attendees on the historical and contemporary issues surrounding genocide but also fostered a sense of community and shared responsibility among participants.

