

Worth Noting

Compiled by Elizabeth Hill

Sewell Provides Update on Atrocity Prevention Board

Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights Sarah Sewell spoke at the Council on Foreign Relations on March 30, on the subject of the Atrocities Prevention Board (APB). Sewell reviewed the origin, purpose, and progress of the APB, and answered questions from the audience.

The APB was established by Presidential Study Directive 10 in August 2011 to coordinate a whole-of-government approach to preventing mass atrocities and genocide. According to Sewell, the APB “feeds into a larger interagency process of decision-making,” and complements and enhances the work of the State Department and other U.S. government agencies.

Sewell discussed the increased focus on atrocity prevention in the years since the APB was established, noting various atrocity prevention efforts across government agencies, such as the State Department’s Anti-Atrocities Coordination Group. Sewell also spoke about the State Department’s Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO) and how CSO works with the U.S. Agency for International Development to “develop evidence-based, civilian-focused intervention options, including diplomatic, programmatic, multilateral, and economic efforts.”

During her remarks at the Council on Foreign Relations, Sewell gave many examples of the APB’s efforts in atrocity prevention, citing interagency efforts to prevent and respond to violence in Burundi and the Central African Republic, as well as helping to counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

While Sewell did note that there is more to be done, she remains encouraged by the progress made by the APB so far, saying “As imperfect as our current efforts are, they represent undeniable progress – both in symbolism and in concrete results. As we approach the APB’s third anniversary, we are certainly closer to realizing the President’s intent that the United States government embraces the mission of preventing mass atrocities. It is my hope that three years from now, the United States will have made its decision-making, tools, resources, and actions even more effective in preventing mass violence against civilians.” **IAJ**