



BUDAPEST CENTRE
FOR THE INTERNATIONAL
PREVENTION OF GENOCIDE
AND MASS ATROCITIES

Prevention of Mass Atrocities in Practice

Roundtable

Pre-event of the VIII. Budapest Human Rights Forum

„Role of Journalists in Prevention of Genocide and Countering Extremism”

Date: 11 November, 2015
Between 14.30 – 17.15

Venue: Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade
H - 1016 Budapest, Bérc utca 13-15.

On November 11, the Budapest Centre for the International Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities hosted a roundtable on the role of journalists in preventing genocide and countering extremism at the Hungarian Institute of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The roundtable was presented as a pre-event of the VIII Budapest Human Rights Forum. The event featured the excellent contributions of a very diverse panel featuring journalists and practitioners in the area of freedom of expression.

The event was opened with a welcome speech by Gyorgy Tatar, Chair of the Budapest Centre, and Márton Schőberl, Director-General of the Institute of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The opening panel also featured the keynote speech of Andras Trom, Head of Section of Foreign and Security Policy of the Association of Hungarian Journalists. Trom pointed out the key role that journalists have in society, insofar as they are charged with reporting on events and thus mediating people's understanding of reality. In this sense, the quality of reporting should be measured as the extent to which it serves the public good. Trom stressed that journalists can either work to foster hate or become actors serving community building, empathy, and tolerance within societies. Trom concluded his speech with the powerful idea that journalists should swear an oath similar to that of medical doctors in which they commit to become agents of peace and reconciliation among all people.

A panel of experts moderated by Enzo Maria Le Fevre Cervini, Director of Research and Cooperation of the Centre, followed the opening session.

Erno Simon, Senior Communication Associate of UNHCR in Hungary, offered the position of his organization regarding the role of journalists in the current refugee emergency. Presenting a few pictures of life in camps as well as tragedies at sea or along the routes of migrants coming to Europe, Simon pointed out that journalists have a fundamental role in ensuring that the broader

public understands that migrants are people living under extremely constrained circumstances and deserving empathy and support.

Riccardo Serri, Deputy Head of Division on Human Rights, European External Action Service, focused on freedom of expression, presented the different instruments available to the international community in defence of a free press, and pointed out the role of the European Union in promoting and upholding such values. In his speech, Serri pointed out to the audience that freedom of expression should be defended in all its forms: online, offline, and through any other media.

Mark Barwick, Policy Adviser for Human Rights Without Frontiers, offered his view on the role that the media can take in the genocidal process along the lines of Gregory Stanton's ten stage leading up to genocide. Arguably, no genocidal project can be performed without the support of the media, insofar as media propaganda is necessary to ensure participation by the broader public. In light of this, a free media serving the public good can conversely be a driver of peace by disrupting negative stereotypes and presenting members of the outgroup as normal human beings entitled to the same rights as locals.

The panel was closed by Nick Thorpe, Central Europe Correspondent for BBC News, who presented the audience a wide range of experiences from his long career in the field. Referring to his recent work with migrants along the Balkans route, he stressed the need for better communication and better flows of information in order to ensure protection of Human Rights as well as orderly movement of people in the interest of states. Thorpe also offered a reflection on the fact that journalists tend to focus extensively on the negative side of the reality they witness while all too often forgetting to report on the positive that nonetheless pervades the world.

The panel was followed by an engaging Q&A session, in which the public addressed all the panellists in a lively discussion.

The Budapest Centre wishes to thank the Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade for hosting the event in its premises, all the panellists for their excellent contributions, and all the attendees for their engaged participation in the event.