**December 2015 Bonus Action – Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act OpEd**

Instructions:

* Please read through, then replace the **bold bracketed []** sections with memories from your own childhood, or from your current traditions. (And in places, with other specific information).
  + Also welcome to make any other changes you may wish to make this feel more your own.
* Submit to Opinion or Op-Ed editor of your local paper.
  + Coordinate with your team, if you are on a team, so that only one submission goes to each publication area.
  + Go online to find out how many words they allow for op-eds and how to send them in.
* Follow up with a phone call to the editor, to make sure they received, and see if they recommend any changes, or if they will publish as is.
* If they don’t plan to publish it, send it to a smaller local newspaper by repeating the steps above.
* No matter what happens, celebrate your great work for peacebuilding!

**[In my childhood, December was a time that typically included eight nights of visits from the “Hannukah Fairy.” After lighting candles on our menorah and singing a few prayers in the living room, someone would say “Oh! What’s that I hear upstairs?! It must be the Hannukah Fairy!” And then my sister and I would scramble up the stairs to see what thoughtful gift might be awaiting us that night.]**

This year - with millions of refugees fleeing genocidal wars, and inter-religious and interracial tensions and violence erupting in our own country, and when nearly every conversation about these topics can easily turn vitriolic - it seems like there is something so lacking in our human family, that material gifts can ring hollow when that thing is so lacking – that thing is peace, and it can be cultivated, and it can be built.

It is often tempting to think of some conflict as intractable – that some people are eternal enemies, and cannot be reasoned with or appeased – but groundwork of trust and empathy can be laid, to get ahead of these vicious cycles of antipathy and violence. In fact there are professional international peacebuilders who are adept at this work, and have been doing it on a relative shoestring budget. It’s far past time for us to ramp this capacity up.

There is a bill about to be introduced in Congress that would solidify recent gains in this field, and strengthen our national ability to avoid the next military entanglement, the next terrorist threat, and the next ethnic or religious conflagration. This bill is the Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act (GAPA), which will be introduced by Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD), Ranking Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

This bill would do four basic things:

1. Authorize The Atrocities Prevention Board. The primary purpose of the interagency APB is “to coordinate a whole-of-government approach to preventing mass atrocities and genocide,” As it is credited in doing in Burundi over the past two years.[[1]](#footnote-1) The cooperative and comprehensive prevention efforts of the APB helped forestall another round of interethnic violence in Burundi, a country already wracked by genocidal conflict.[[2]](#footnote-2)
2. Authorize The Complex Crises Fund (along with an increase in funding from $50 million - $100 million). In 2013, CCF allocated resources for the swift and effective stopping of mass violence in the Central African Republic through effective community peacebuilding practices.[[3]](#footnote-3) CCF has also been effective in dozens of other countries including Yemen, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Sri Lanka, Cote D’Ivoire, and Tunisia.
3. Require conflict prevention and peacebuilding training for all State Department Foreign Service Officers.
4. Affirm Atrocities Prevention as a US policy priority.

The world can be a complicated and daunting place, but when we have demonstrated skills and success in international peacebuilding, for humanity’s sake let’s build on these successes – let’s enhance those skills – let’s pass this bill and keep doing what it takes in international relations to reduce violence, transform conflict, and enhance cooperation. I commend Senator Cardin for this forward-thinking bill, and I call on **[Senator Mikulski] [insert the names of your two Senators]** to give it her full support – and also ask **[Congressman Van Hollen] [insert the name of your House Member]** to give his support to the House version when it is introduced.

**[I’m not expecting to “hear the Hannukah Fairy” upstairs this December, but I do dare to believe that our country and our world can take steps together toward a more peaceful future.]** This year, let’s give each other the most kind and thoughtful gift of all – let’s give each other and ourselves the gift of peace.

*[Write one or two short sentences describing yourself and stating your role with The Peace Alliance www.peacealliance.org.]*

1. Credit and Thanks to FCNL, for their Atrocities Prevention Brief [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2015/06/11/we-predicted-burundis-crisis-is-the-response-working/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/international/218272-assessing-the-state-of-us-atrocity-prevention-policy [↑](#footnote-ref-3)