Resolution Against Genocide

As passed by the Council of Representatives of the American Psychological Association, February 2008

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Introduction

Throughout human history and continuing to the present, the issue of genocide or mass violence has been a devastating reality (Staub, 2000). Psychology is in a unique position to both inform our understanding of the causes and solutions to genocide (Munn, 2006; Sternberg, 2003). While governments and the United Nations work to address this life altering and history altering crisis, Non-Governmental Organizations, such as the American Psychological Association, have the skills, knowledge, and expertise to increase awareness and ultimately bring about peace and reconciliation (Howe, 2004). In keeping with its charge, APA's Committee on International Relations in Psychology and Committee on Ethnic Minority Affairs call on all psychologists to respond to this global continuing crisis with the unique contribution that can be made by mental health educators, researchers, and counselors.

WHEREAS the American Psychological Association has demonstrated its commitment to the fight for human rights of all people through (1) its resolutions against racism, stereotypes, and male violence against women, (2) the establishment of the Committee on International Relations in Psychology, the Committee on Ethnic Minority Affairs, and the Committee on Women in Psychology and (3) its ongoing support for the efforts of the United Nations to promote and defend human rights (Bryant-Davis, Okorodudu, Holliday, 2004);

WHEREAS the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide defines the term as: Any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group (United Nations, 1948);

WHEREAS "unintentional" or indirect acts of destruction such as forced marching and forced starvation are also crimes against humanity;

WHEREAS genocide is the ultimate display of hate, fear, and violence, which are learned attitudes and behaviors; (Staub, 2006: Dutton, Boyanowsky, & Bond, 2005; Sternberg, 2003);

WHEREAS genocide can be an outgrowth of multiple factors including promotion of self advancement at the cost of other's human rights; crisis of resources, compliance with authoritarian leaderships, and prejudice which is unfavorable affective reactions or evaluations of groups and their members (Waller, 2006; Finzsch, 2005);

WHEREAS genocide threatens basic human rights of survival, security, development, and social participation (Lang, 2006; Mork, 2003);

WHEREAS genocide has negative cognitive, behavioral, affective, relational, and spiritual effects on child and adult victims, as well as on perpetrators, historically and contemporarily (Dutton, Boyanowsky, & Bond, 2005; Ursano, Fullterton, & Norwood, 2003; van der Kolk, McFarlane, & Weisaeth, 1996);

WHEREAS genocide is often combined with systematic rape and displacement of victims and severe mental health consequences for survivors of genocide that have been shown to increase anxiety, depression, self-defeating thoughts, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse,

suicide, homicide, and a host of health complications in targeted communities (Bolton, 2001; Staub, 1999; Herman, 1997);

WHEREAS genocide has been shown to severely alter the developmental trajectory of children who are exposed to it by negatively impacting academic and social development, self-esteem, and self-efficacy (Kaplan, 2006, Dyregrov, Gupta, Gjestad, & Mukanoheli, 2000);

WHEREAS genocide intersects with race, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic status in ways that are unique in creating disenfranchisement and environments of vulnerability; (Gangoli, 2006; Bryant-Davis, 2005; Lindsey, 2002; Moses, 2002; Bhavnani, & Backer, 2000)

WHEREAS genocide has long term intergenerational traumatic effects on whole communities (Kaplan, 2006; Ritchie, Watson, & Friedman, 2005; Briere, 2004; Staub, 2000);

WHEREAS the United Nations has established genocide and systematic rape as crimes against humanity (United Nations, 2004; Osborn, 2001);

WHEREAS genocide negatively affects perpetrators by perpetuating distorted thinking about the self and others, including cognitions that dehumanize those who are targeted (Staub, Pearlman, Gubin, & Hagengimana, 2005; Staub, 2004);

WHEREAS genocide has negative effects on intergroup relations, magnifying distrust, fear, vigilance, suspicion, anxiety, stereotypes, and disconnection (Kressel, 2003; Bolton, 2001);

WHEREAS genocide continues to occur throughout human history (Lal, 2005);

WHEREAS the psychological devastation of genocide has been established in psychological studies of the genocides of the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas, Africans in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, Jewish people in the Holocaust, Armenians in 1915, the Tutsis in Rwanda, Cambodians, Guatemalans, Ukrainians, Chinese in the Nanking Massacre, Muslims in Bosnia, and most currently the Black people of the Darfur region of the Sudan where assaults against the Black Sudanese have resulted in the murder of more than 450,000 persons , the rape of countless women and girls, and the displacement of 2.5 million persons (Bush, 2007; Lippman, 2007; Hinton, 2005; Steinweis, 2005; Austin, 2004; Midlarsky & Midlarsky, 2004; Mueller, 2004; Beristain, Paez, & González, 2000; Elovitz, 1999);

WHEREAS the struggle against genocide requires continued active resistance through science and practice that promotes social justice and human rights globally (McMillion, 2005; Howe, 2004; Foa, Keane, & Friedman, 2004);

WHEREAS passive observation of violent acts (the “bystander effect”) has negative consequences on individuals and communities (Lippman, 2007; Fischer, Greitemeyer, Pollozek, & Frey, 2006);

WHEREAS the American Psychological Association opposes all manifestation of hate, prejudice, discrimination, and violence and affirms the basic human rights of all people for survival, equality, dignity, respect, and liberty (Kahn, 1985);

WHEREAS psychological science and practice can inform reconciliation processes (Staub, 2006; Munn, 2006; McMillion, 2005; Suedfeld, 2000);

Therefore be it resolved that the American Psychological Association condemns genocide wherever it occurs across the globe and confirms that all people have the right to survival and safety;

Be it further resolved that the American Psychological Association will recommend:

(1) That the international community, professional organizations, and individual psychologists work toward the development of policies that work to eradicate and prevent genocide and to ameliorate its impact on individuals and communities.

(2) The development of research that fosters our understanding of the causes, effects, and solutions to race-based and ethnicity-based hate crimes.

(3) The implementation of interventions that promote equality, social justice, and reconciliation across cultures.

(4) The exploration of the gendered experience of genocide including systematic rape.

(5) The awareness raising of psychologists and psychologists-in-training about the prevalence and impact of genocide through curriculum development, conference presentation, research dissemination, and use of media outlets.

(6) The promulgation of psychological strategies to promote the recovery of victims, community reconciliation, and human rights for all persons.

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