

Belmont Human Rights Statement on Genocide Awareness Month

We may all be aware of the genocide of the Holocaust, of the Armenians, of the Native Americans, of African Americans, and many more. We may think that genocides are horrors of history. However, the possibility of genocides is ever-present. Consider that the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine may be defined as a genocide. Genocide was first recognized as a crime under international law in 1946 by the United Nations General Assembly (see UN.org), at which time the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide was adopted.

The United Nations Convention describes “any acts committed with intent to destroy in whole, or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group. ... [Acts include] killing members of the group; causing serious mental or bodily harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring on its physical destruction, in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; and forcibly removing of children of the group to another group. The Genocide Convention establishes that genocide may occur in the context of armed conflict, but it can also occur in peacetime as well.

Dr. Gregory Stanton, who taught genocide studies at George Mason University and is now president of Genocide Watch, describes ten stages of genocide. At any point in the non-linear process that leads to genocide, interventions can be made that thwart it. According to Genocide Watch, the stages include classification, symbolization, discrimination, dehumanization, organization, polarization, preparation, persecution, extermination, and denial. To prevent “Classification,” where people are divided into “us and them” categories, societies can promote inclusiveness and common ground. To prevent symbolization, societies can disavow hate speech or the use of symbols to portray hate (e.g., swastikas). To prevent discrimination, societies can ensure that dominant groups do not deny the civil rights of minorities. This includes voting rights. The hope is that the path to genocide can be averted in these early stages before polarization, preparation, and persecution lead to extermination, followed by denial.

For more information go to GenocideWatch.com and UN.org/GenocidePrevention.

The Belmont Human Rights Commission is dedicated to fighting discrimination in all forms and increasing visibility and awareness of issues regarding diversity and discrimination in our community. If you have experienced discrimination in Belmont, contact Belmont.hrc@gmail.com or call 617-993-2795.