

We are also pushing hard on the humanitarian organizations that do have access to Afghanistan to understand that people who are LGBTQ are going to have increased barriers to access to humanitarian services, and that means things like food, aid, shelter, and protection. If you are queer and you do not know who you are going to encounter at the point of help, then you are not going to seek out that help unless it is explicitly offered to you in a queer-friendly and inclusive way. This is something that international humanitarian organizations have some capability to take control of.

From a prevention standpoint, I think the comments that I made at the beginning of the discussion were simply that we cannot let situations like this pass in the future. Those of us who work on global LGBTQI rights need to take the perspective that no situation is too hard, which is sometimes the case. We look at countries like Somalia, and we think how can we possibly engage on LGBTQ rights. We do not have an automatic civil society to engage with. We do not know how to broach these conversations with the government. We have to get past that, and we have to start engaging in the most difficult places because otherwise people's lives are at risk.

I am going to stop there and turn over to Detmer.

### **REMARKS BY DETMER KREMER**

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Thank you so much. Thank you, everyone, for being here. Thank you, Kate, for this introduction and for this wonderful panel. It is really exciting to be here and talk about our new paper, "Queering Atrocity Prevention."

We know that queer people's experiences of mass violence, including genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes, are not new. There are many historical examples of where queer people have experienced violence. In our paper, we talk, in particular, for example, about the Holocaust and the different ways in which moralistic language weaponizing queer identities was used, and in the former Yugoslavia as well.

But even though these experiences are not new, we know they are not well known. We know they are not integrated often in atrocity prevention structures. How we think about these issues and understand these forms of violence and crucially how we try to seek to prevent those from happening is what this paper seeks to understand better, and particularly raise a lot of questions about. It is not a paper that aims to have all the answers, but it is a paper that seeks to have this conversation and to ask these questions so we can move that forward.

These questions have become more and more urgent as we noticed around the world that incidents of mass violence are becoming more common rather than less common. There are three particular types of examples of these situations that I wanted to touch on to illustrate the urgency of the questions that we are raising in the paper.

The first one is Vladimir Putin's campaigns of political homophobia and transphobia that have been going on for about two decades—weaponizing queer identities both on a domestic level and an international level. Domestically, we have seen laws banning the discussion of LGBTQI issues in schools, in media, in public publications, and civil society organizations. On a domestic level, this has led to an explosion in violent hate crime experienced by LGBTQI+ youth across the country and, in particular, violent escalation with the so-called "gay purges" in Chechnya where there are still instances of violence happening, albeit on a slightly lesser scale. However, we also see this particularly in Russia's foreign and international policy where this weaponization of queer identities has also become part of the narrative of the justification of invading Ukraine with a supposed desire to rescue Ukraine from a European, particularly queer, morally failing regime.

Another situation that really spurred some of this research is exactly what Neela was just discussing regarding Afghanistan and the situations there unfolding after the rapid withdrawal of allied forces and the Taliban takeover. It is exactly that documenting and recording in the paper authored by OutRight International and Human Rights Watch that show the necessity to understand what these risks are and the violence that is happening on that broad spectrum, not only focusing on LGBTQI+ communities, but LGBTQI+ communities as one of the many different kinds of communities facing increased risk and violence.

The last one that I want to touch upon is Protection Approaches. We are a UK-based organization, and we believe that the prevention of violence must occur in every society because these risks are present in every society and must be prevented in every society. We are seeing a very alarming rise in transphobia in the United Kingdom. A very notable example recently was the government's announcement of scrapping its longstanding commitment to finally ban the torture practice of conversion therapy. Then civil society pressure reinstated this commitment. However, the government chose to leave transgender people out of this commitment, and this comes on the heels of a growing, particularly aggressive "culture war" where trans identities are increasingly weaponized. We are not arguing that this meets the threshold of a mass atrocity instance of violence, but these are the kind of risks that we want to be thinking about and that we seek to understand better so that we may better prevent them.

All of these instances really spurred the research of this paper and this idea of queering atrocity prevention. I also want to make clear, because "queering" has become quite a popular word, what it is that we seek to do when we mention "queering." There is a twofold definition for us there. The first one is that we seek to bring to the fore the particular experiences and insecurities people and individuals face based on the perception of their sexual orientation, gender identities, and sexual characteristics, that through certain cisgender or heteronormative lenses are seen as perverse or vulgar or outside of society and, thus, deserving of violence. The second part of queering is that it is a political commitment to interrogate the systems and structures of power, to determine what they are, who they benefit, and who they harm. As part of that political commitment, we look to reimagine what those systems could be to ensure that they work toward building a more just, inclusive society.

The question that I am particularly interested in figuring out in this conversation is what are the blind spots that exist in these sectors regarding LGBTQI+ communities? Again, this is a conversation that we want to have, want other people to join in on, and particularly, as we are not legal experts at Protection Approaches, thinking about where might those gaps lie in international law and what would be the opportunities to mitigate them.

That is it for me right now, but I am really looking forward to this conversation and to hearing from the other panelists.

## **KATE FERGUSON**

Thank you so much, Neela and Detmer, for kicking us off, and I will just hand straight over to Jean and then to Christine for some responses and also reflections that do not need to be limited by those two publications by any means.