INTRODUCTION:
SLIDE ONE: Can a Museum prevent genocide? I think no matter how this is sliced, it is a daunting question. Thus, I would like to begin with a few foundational points. First off, although the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum doesn’t typically categorize itself as a human rights museum, genocide certainly exists as an egregious human rights violation. Acts of genocide include depriving individuals within groups of their economic, social, and civil rights – and of course, the ultimate destruction of life itself is the most extreme violation. I also want to acknowledge the challenge of the word “genocide” itself. A very specific and loaded term, it has in the past proved counter-productive to action. Discussions regarding the use of genocide versus other terms such as crimes against humanity, mass atrocity, protection of civilians are alive and thriving in the field.

SLIDE TWO:
For our purposes today, my use of the term genocide will be in accordance with framing used in the Genocide Prevention Task Force document: “genocide and mass atrocities meaning large-scale and deliberate attacks on civilians.” For those not familiar with the Task Force, it was convened by the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, the United States Institute for Peace and the American Academy for Diplomacy and offered to the U.S. government a blueprint of how all elements of the government might be better structured to prevent and respond to genocide. Next, we have the lofty question: can genocide be prevented? Ben Valentino’s work is one among others that identifies incremental steps that lead to genocide – thus punctuating genocide as a process. If it is a process, it is not inevitable. That is the concept under which we operate at the Museum, and one that I will return to in a few moments. Alas – we are then left with the bold question: Can a Museum prevent genocide. My talk today will focus on the ways in which the United States Holocaust Museum has humbly attempted to address that question through its educational outreach to one audience in particular: the military.

SLIDE THREE:
I would like start with some contextual background about the Museum. It opened in 1993 in Washington, D.C. and is a federal institution. It was created through a Presidential charter and receives Congressional appropriations for funding. As a result, we are to serve in an educational capacity more so than one of advocacy.
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Can A Museum Prevent Genocide?: Educational Training for Military Professionals at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
FIHREM October 2011
Theme: Fighting for Equality: Social Change through Human Rights Activism

SLIDE FOUR:
Defined as a “living memorial”, its mission is to inspire citizens and leaders worldwide to confront hatred, prevent genocide, and preserve human dignity. We continually ask ourselves: How is this mission best achieved? I would like to break down the mission to identify how it drives our work.

SLIDE FIVE:
First and foremost: the Museum is a memorial to those who lost their lives during the Holocaust. And from the beginning we were charged with being a “living memorial” – remembering the history in ways that matter today. In our case, we conclude: how better to memorialize than to influence events such that similar human rights violations do not again occur. A primary means of achieving this mission is through educating about the history of the Holocaust. With regard to our educational outreach, we address citizens and leaders differently.

SLIDE SIX:
Who are our “leaders”? We have defined them as those holding leadership positions in professions that hold the public trust. This includes law enforcement, civil servants, judges, medical professionals, military - basically - those professionals in positions to safeguard the ideals of a democratic society…those roles comes with responsibility.

SLIDE SEVEN:
Our outreach to professionals was sparked by one such leader. Charles Ramsey, then Chief of the metropolitan DC police, visited the Museum and was struck by this photograph of a traditional police officer standing side-by-side with a member of the S.S. Chief Ramsey, asked himself “How did those police officers, that probably took an oath very similar to the one I took… become part and parcel of something so horrible?” At the time, his units were dealing with challenges of racial profiling. Chief Ramsey approached the Museum, in conjunction with the Anti-Defamation League, to see if we might create a Museum program that would allow his officers an opportunity to examine the challenges of their professional roles and responsibilities through the history of the Holocaust.

SLIDE EIGHT:
The outreach was born and to date we have reached over 80,000 professionals in what are typically one-day programs. The focus of this work is not about empowering potential victims as much as it is about reminding those in positions of power what happens if they abdicate their responsibility to uphold democratic principles that preserve human dignity.
SLIDE NINE:
Yet, even among these professionals, the military is somewhat unique as they are charged with the utmost responsibility of killing in order to preserve life — a confounding paradox. In addition, one aspect that is clear about genocide and mass atrocity is that armed conflicts, and thus, military personnel, are almost always present when genocide and mass atrocity occur.

SLIDE TEN:
Thus, in addition to the already mentioned focus on professional responsibility, work with the military is also about galvanizing witnesses who might be in positions to act to prevent genocide/mass atrocity. High policy documents coming out of the U.S. government right now, including the recent Presidential Study Directive calling for the creation of an Interagency Atrocities Prevention Board, have also upped the military’s interest in learning more about this topic.

SLIDE ELEVEN:
The Museum has intentionally worked with the military since 2006 serving over 28,000 officers-in-training and U.S. and international active duty officers. Since 2010 we have intentionally enhanced our emphasis on genocide prevention.

HOW DOES THE MUSEUM APPROACH THIS WORK?
SLIDE TWELVE:
A few assumptions underlie our work in this arena, and I touched on these a bit earlier. I share these now in overview, and I will go into more detail as I work through our methodology. Genocide is a process; genocide is preventable; individuals may be in positions to act in ways that can halt genocide.

SLIDE THIRTEEN:
In every program we conduct, we seek to address each of these three framing components: Literacy, disequilibrium and relevance. Not unlike the framing for transformative education, these seek to move the participants in ways beyond the cognitive.

I will address each of these in terms of CONTENT and APPROACH while also connecting them to the assumptions.

SLIDE FOURTEEN:
With regard to literacy, we are speaking about historical literacy with a goal of dispelling myths about how atrocities occur by emphasizing that genocide is a process. Primarily, we seek to educate about the Holocaust — our area of expertise.
With regard to today, we pair this examination with a consideration of early warning indicators currently being used as a tool for prevention. A variety of indicator lists exist including those created by Barbara Harff and Ted Gurr, Greg Stanton and Minorities at Risk. Thus the process of genocide counters ideas that violence simply erupts due to “ancient ethnic hatreds,” or a “madman who brainwashed people.”

SLIDE FIFTEEN:
The Holocaust, of course, did not begin with Auschwitz. When we examine the Holocaust we pay special attention to 1933 – 1939 and those events that occurred before the outbreak of war. For example, consider the Nuremberg Laws which in 1935 represented the state’s identification of who was Jewish, thereby providing a means to formalize the marginalization of this segment of society. Early warning indicators that fit here include the exclusionary element of state ideology and state-led discrimination.

SLIDE SIXTEEN:
For our approach here we maximize our on-site exhibition – especially the top floor that examines 1933 – 1939. Guided tours allow time to teach about the history in conjunction with the indicators and also provides time for discussion and questions. Our installation on contemporary genocide From Memory to Action also provides a step-by-step breakdown of indicators with regard to events in Rwanda, Srebrenica and Darfur.

SLIDE SEVENTEEN:
From knowledge often emerges the next component: disequilibrium. Understanding the process reveals the human element: genocide is caused human actors fueled by human motivations. In most cases, these humans are not monsters or zealots – but ordinary people– with various motivations compelling behavior. The work of Christopher Browning punctuates this for the Holocaust while James Waller has elaborated on this for more recent events. Understanding the human actors at play is one way to complicate the history. Chief Ramsey illustrated this when he made a connection with that police officer.

SLIDE EIGHTEEN:
Our approach in this regard for leadership in general is to examine the role played by a particular profession during the Nazi era. With the military, we can ask: Why did a professional institution that pre-dated the Nazi political party become involved in this party’s initiatives – as evidenced as early on as 1934 with a new oath to Hitler. Although the historical context is unique, this raises issues of institutional vulnerability.
Rather than all being rabid antisemites, other more universal motivations such as resources, respect, and room to accomplish its mission enter the picture.

**SLIDE NINETEEN:**
From the institutional we move to the individuals: What does it mean for the professionals who are part of the larger institution? Case studies open this conversation. Consider the true situation of a German Army infantry battalion situated in occupied Belarus in October of 1941. Ordered by their major to kill Jews under their jurisdiction, three company commanders respond differently. Why? Discussions ensue about influencing situational factors such as command climate, unit dynamics, peer pressure and careerism. A point revealed is that even in the most extreme of circumstances, individual discretion existed. For leadership considerations this punctuates the importance of individual agency when upholding professional responsibilities. For genocide prevention, it sheds light on the actors involved and reveals a very human aspect of what might otherwise be written off as irrational acts that are beyond comprehension – or solution.

**SLIDE TWENTY:**
In fact, this examination leads to a consideration that something can be done. Individuals are reminded of how their abdication of responsibility can have impacts well beyond their immediate realm. They see the potential for actions that might curb violence. Some comments reveal some of the take-aways...

Officers leave the program with new knowledge and a new sense of how their awareness can fuel future action.

**SLIDE TWENTY-ONE:**
Many challenges certainly exist with this work. Again – consider definitions – genocide? Mass atrocity? Protection of civilians? Which is helpful in mobilizing the field to positive action? Prevention – As opposed to peace-building, we are working to prevent something – how can we ever prove we were successful? Is the Holocaust the best case study? Is it too extreme and too specific to be useful? In fact, a challenge in the genocide studies field in general is that it has been founded on the most extreme circumstances and that focus on such extremes may lead to overlooking other smaller but addressable problems. Long-term impacts – we have proof that examining these issues is impactful in the short –run - but what about months and years down the road? This is work that still must be done.
Can a Museum prevent genocide? Proving the photo-negative is never easy. Just as more work is to be done in this young and emerging field, so, too, must our programs grow and evolve as we learn more about our audiences and more about how their Museum experiences inform their actions. We will continue to explore how our expertise can lend contributions to the field. During our time together, and even after we leave, I invite any insights from the wealth of expertise in this room to weigh in on these next steps.