



## **A Note on Recent Criticism of the Lemkin Institute**

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2024 has been a difficult year for genocide prevention, and as the work of The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention and Human Security (LIGPHS) has gained greater prominence, we must address several recent attacks on the character of our work and staff. Our mission is clear and we hope to clarify charges from Azeri media and from two bloggers for pro-Israel outlets, who accuse us of “besmirching” Raphael Lemkin’s name. We have always sought, and continue to welcome, further communication with any and all members of the Lemkin family. While we may disagree, we remain steadfast in our mission and in our support of Raphael Lemkin’s legacy.

The Lemkin Institute is an international, all-volunteer organization of genocide scholars, human rights professionals, and grassroots activists. We exist to fill a gap in the global prevention protocols, having heard from many survivors that the worst thing about living through genocide was the sense that the rest of the world did not care and had forgotten about them. We built the Lemkin Institute to be responsive and flexible, transparent and judicious, nonpartisan and vocal. We believe that peoples in crisis need immediate action and direct support. Our focus is on what can be done to alleviate genocidal conditions wherever they exist. We are proud of our record and of our unfailingly frank assessments. Our commitment is above all to threatened communities. This is the legacy of Raphael Lemkin that we seek to fulfill.

Stemming from a 2016 trip by our Executive Director, Dr. Elisa von Joeden-Forgey, and other members of the Executive Board of the International Association of Genocide Scholars to Iraq in solidarity with the Ezidis, Christians, Shabak-Shia, Kakay, and other groups persecuted by ISIS, the Institute has grown under her dedicated leadership. Our detractors have focused on our incorporation in Philadelphia, a fact that reflects the nature of such a multinational institute: Dr. von Joeden-Forgey is a US citizen based in Philadelphia, who left a position as an endowed chair of Holocaust and Genocide Studies to manage LIGPHS full-time as an unpaid volunteer. She oversees volunteer workers from various geographical areas, including Pakistan, the UK, Geneva, Kyiv, Yerevan, Berlin, Paris, Amsterdam, Seattle, and DC, and has cultivated partnerships with organizations working in Armenia, Darfur, Bangladesh, Ukraine, Ethiopia, Italy, Iran, and Somaliland, to name a few.

Our educational programming, red flag alerts, advisories, and research-driven reports often reflect uncomfortable realities. They may be inconvenient, but they are factual and well-respected. Our methodology integrates the insights of Raphael Lemkin into the crime of genocide, especially his gender-sensitive lens. In 2024 alone, our statements have been read by survivors, by Special Rapporteurs, and by policy makers; we have collaborated with Doctors Against Genocide and Genocide Watch, among other groups; and Dr. von Joeden-Forgey has spoken in Kyiv, Riga, Yerevan, and Bangladesh, as well as at the International Religious Freedom (IRF) Summit in Washington, DC, advocating against genocide and for the rights of all peoples to self-determination.

As noted in the *Algemeiner*,

“the institute’s 2023 annual report listed only \$10,300 in revenue. Yet in addition to the outsized social media footprint, the institute has also generated press mentions, with coverage and placements in media outlets including *Newsweek* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Its website lists a seven-person leadership team that includes personnel devoted to outreach, education, research, communications, and operations.”

All of this is a point of pride for the LIGPHS. In today’s world there is minimal funding for the prevention of genocide, while a tragic amount is spent on its perpetration. We rely on the generosity of ordinary people around the world, and our most common contribution is a one-time donation of \$10, which we are so honored to receive. Implications or reports that we receive “secret” or grant funding are false. We intentionally do not seek funding from states, governments, political parties, large foundations, and large NGOs because we value our independence and believe that independence is necessary to ensure we have a clear and honest voice.

With know that with increased impact comes increased scrutiny, including politically-motivated scrutiny; however, the threat of such scrutiny does not give genocide scholars, genocide studies centers, or prevention institutes the right to avoid uncomfortable topics. With moral support from survivor communities and everyday people, the Lemkin Institute seeks to speak inconvenient truths when other scholars and institutions either cannot or will not. Because of our fearless and unfettered advocacy, we have been some of the first voices to sound the alarm on the threat of genocide in Ukraine, in Artsakh, in Ethiopia against the Amhara, and in Palestine, using the same analytical mechanism for each case.

It is almost never popular to call out genocide as it is happening or to point to red flags as the process is getting started, but without such work, the world has little chance of survival and no chance of rising above this terrible crime. We will continue with our mission to create a shared global language of genocide prevention and we hope everyone will join us in the movement to end genocide once and for all. All human beings, everywhere, deserve to live out their lives in their collective identities without facing violence, humiliation, criminalization, dispossession, death, or erasure.