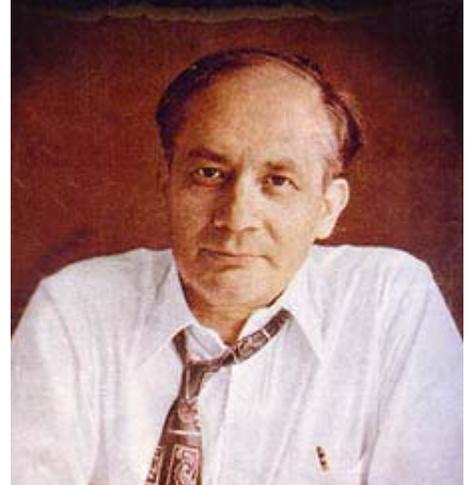


What is Genocide?

In 1933, a Polish-Jewish lawyer named Raphael Lemkin asked a question that would change history: “Why is the killing of a million a lesser crime than the killing of a single individual?” Based on his study of the Armenian massacres and other atrocities, he began work on a new international crime that would encompass the “systematic and organized destruction of the social order of a collectivity.”

By 1944, while Winston Churchill and the Allies were facing “a crime without a name,” Lemkin was working ceaselessly to name it, believing that a crime, once named, could be prevented and its perpetrators brought to justice. He formed the word genocide by combining *geno-*, from the Greek word for race or tribe, with *-cide*, from the Latin word for killing. In proposing this new word, Lemkin had in mind “a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves.” The next year, the International Military Tribunal held at Nuremberg, Germany, charged top Nazi officials with “crimes against humanity.” The word genocide was included in the indictment, but as a descriptive, not legal, term.



Raphael Lemkin (1900-1959)

On Dec. 9, 1948, the new crime gained international recognition, and the word genocide was codified in the United Nations Declaration for the Prevention and Punishment for the Crime of Genocide.

According to Article II, “In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group as such:

- 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. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”

The Convention entered into force in 1951, and more than 130 nations have ratified it since. The United States adopted this convention in 1988.

The definition of genocide is still controversial, and many scholars have sought to broaden the identification and recognition of groups that have experienced genocide. Dr. Gregory Stanton sought to illuminate the genocidal process by defining genocide in 10 stages:

1. CLASSIFICATION (“Us” vs. “Them”)
2. SYMBOLIZATION (names or symbols)
3. DISCRIMINATION (deny targeted group’s rights)
4. DEHUMANIZATION (deny targeted group’s humanity)
5. ORGANIZATION (establish formal or informal plans)
6. POLARIZATION (“with us or against us”)
7. PREPARATION (plan infrastructure and implementation)
8. PERSECUTION (identify or separate targeted group)
9. EXTERMINATION (murder of targeted group)
10. DENIAL (cover up murders or blame the targeted group)

Further Reading

Books:

- “Century of Genocide,” edited by Samuel Totten
- “Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction,” by Adam Jones
- “Blood and Soil,” by Ben Kiernan
- “The Enough Moment,” by John Prendergast and Don Cheadle

Web sites:

- <http://www.ushmm.org/confront-genocide>
- <http://endgenocide.org/>
- <http://www.enoughproject.org/>
- <http://www.genocidewatch.org/>