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A Definition of Genocide

Following is a definition of genocide by Raphael Lemkin, from Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944), 79. The term "genocide" was coined by Lemkin specifically to describe the systematic murders carried out by Axis powers. Lemkin's definition was the basis for the inclusion of the term "genocide" in the UN Geneva Conventions.

By "genocide" we mean the destruction of a nation or of an ethnic group. This new word, coined by the author to denote an old practice in its modern development, is made from the ancient Greek word genos (race, tribe) and the Latin cide (killing), thus corresponding in its formation to such words as tyrannicide, homicide, infanticide, etc. Generally speaking, genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation, except when accomplished by mass killings of all members of a nation. It is intended rather to signify 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 objectives of such a plan would be the disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups. Genocide is directed against the national group as an entity, and the actions involved are directed against individuals, not in their individual capacity, but as members of a national group.