

# When Hate **BECOMES** GENOCIDE



GATE TO THE NAZI GERMAN DEATH CAMP AUSCHWITZ, OŚWIECIM, POLAND

“

*The Holocaust did not begin  
in the gas chambers  
—it began with words.*

”

—Irwin Cotler, Former Minister of Justice, Canada

# FROM HATE

**Hate** noun (‘hāt): 1) intense hostility and aversion usually deriving from fear, anger, or sense of injury; 2) extreme dislike or disgust; 3) a systematic and especially politically exploited expression of hatred

**Hate speech** noun (‘hāt ‘spēch): speech that is intended to insult, offend, or intimidate a person because of some trait (such as race, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, or disability)

**Hate crime** noun (‘hāt ‘krīm): any of various underlying crimes (such as assault or defacement of property) becomes a hate crime when motivated by hostility to the victim as a member of a protected group (such as one based on color, creed, gender, or sexual orientation)

Irwin Cotler, a former minister of justice of Canada, in remembering the Nazi genocide of 6 million Jews, explains why words can be very dangerous:

*“As we remember the six million Jewish victims of the Holocaust—first defamed, demonized, and dehumanized, as prologue or justification for genocide, then murdered—we have to understand that the mass murder of millions is not a matter of abstract statistics.*

*The enduring lesson of the Holocaust and the genocides that followed is that they occurred not simply because of the machinery of death but because of a state-sanctioned ideology of hate. This teaching of contempt, this demonizing of the other—this is where it all begins.*

*As the Canadian Supreme Court recognized, in words echoed by the international criminal tribunals in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, the Holocaust did not begin in the gas chambers—it began with words. These, as the courts put it, are the chilling facts of history. These are the catastrophic effects of racism.”*

# TO GENOCIDE

**Genocide** noun (gen·o·cide - jen-uh-sahyd) from Greek géno(s) race + Latin -cide killing; the deliberate and systematic destruction of a racial, political, or cultural group

synonyms: racial killing, massacre, mass slaughter, annihilation, extermination, elimination, liquidation, eradication, decimation

**Genocidal** adjective ('jenə'sidl) relating to or involving the deliberate killing of a large group of people of a particular nation or ethnic group

*Source: Meriam Webster Dictionary, Oxford Dictionaries*

Genocide is defined in international law as “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group.”<sup>1</sup> But how do genocides occur? How does hatred of one group turn from emotion to action?


The word “genocide” was coined in the 1940s by Raphael Lemkin, a Polish Jewish lawyer, in his 1944 book, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*. The book was a legal analysis of Germany’s occupation of Europe during the war. Nazi Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, sparking World War II. A few days earlier, Lemkin barely managed to escape to Sweden, eventually making his way to the United States. The Nazis murdered 49 members of his family in the Holocaust. Only his brother survived.

Lemkin’s word “genocide” was adopted by the international community and used in the post-war Nuremberg Trials against Nazi war criminals.

# THE 8 STAGES OF GENOCIDE

In 1996, Gregory H. Stanton, research professor of Genocide Studies and Prevention at George Mason University, identified eight stages that lead to genocide.<sup>2</sup> He warned that genocides all follow predictable patterns, yet they are preventable if measures are taken early.

- 1. Classification:** Distinguishing groups of people into “us and them.” Emphasis is placed on what sets the two categories apart, how they are different, and ignores similarities (example: Hutu vs. Tutsi).
- 2. Symbolization:** Names or symbols are used to distinguish the “others.” Sometimes, these symbols are forced upon groups like a blue scarf during the Cambodian genocide or a yellow Star of David under the Nazis in Germany.
- 3. Dehumanization:** This stage denies humanity for a certain group. Members will be referred to as creatures, diseases, etc. Dehumanization strips the guilt about murdering another human. Through propaganda and hate speech, people begin to seem less and less human and therefore less sympathetic. This process makes murder more palatable. For instance, during the Rwandan genocide, Tutsis were often described as cockroaches.
- 4. Organization:** Whether informal or centralized in nature, a genocide is always carried out through an organization of individuals. Plans are created and then carried out by groups of people.
- 5. Polarization:** The gap between “us and them” grows. Propaganda and hate speech are used to amplify differences. Laws may be used to further distance the two—for example,



intermarriage being outlawed or Germans being told not to shop in Jewish stores. During this stage, moderates who oppose hate are often silenced.

- 6. Preparation:** The genocide is set into motion, property is seized, deportations occur, murder is planned.
- 7. Extermination:** Mass killings begin. Since the victims are not considered fully human, the perpetrators do not consider what they are doing to be murder but an “extermination,” similar to exterminating a pest problem of mice or insects.
- 8. Denial:** Each genocide is followed by denial. The perpetrators try to cover up evidence. They refuse to label their actions as genocide. Over a century since the Armenian genocide, Turkey still refuses to admit that it happened. As recently as April of 2019, Turkish president Erdogan challenged the notion.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Holocaust denial is an “attempt to negate the established facts of the Nazi genocide of European Jewry. Holocaust denial and distortion are forms of antisemitism. They are generally motivated by hatred of Jews and build on the claim that the Holocaust was invented or exaggerated by Jews as part of a plot to advance Jewish interests.”

According to Stanton, genocide denial is the biggest indicator of future genocides. When mass killing is explained away or denied, the world stays vulnerable for the next genocide to occur.

Stanton further argues that genocides are preventable if the patterns are identified and the world reacts. Genocides can be stopped if we do not allow hate to motivate action.

*“Get it all on record now - get the films - get the witnesses  
-because somewhere down the road of history some  
bastard will get up and say that this never happened.”*

— Dwight D. Eisenhower

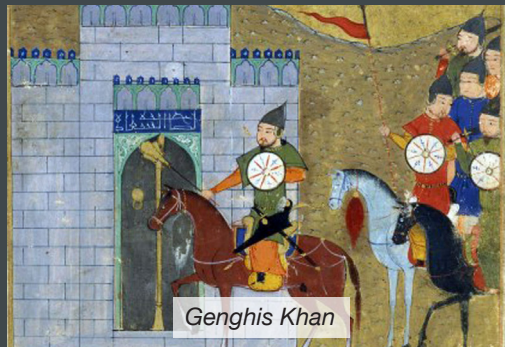
# GENOCIDES

*have been part of human history for centuries, practiced by many different cultures*

**Wu Hu Massacres** (fourth century): Chinese General Ran Min ordered the mass murder of all the Wu Hu peoples, killing an estimated 200,000.<sup>4</sup>

## **Mongolian**

**Conquests** (13th century): Mongolian armies led by Genghis Khan and his sons conquered much of Asia, the Middle East, and parts of Eastern Europe. In the process the Mongolian armies committed genocides against the Tata Mongols, the Turkic Kankalis, Iraqi Arabs, Persians, Afghanis, Slavs, and others.<sup>5</sup>



**The Tamerlane Massacres** (14th century): The massacres were carried out by Turko-Mongol conqueror Tamerlane, who “killed all the Christians he could find, including everyone in the, then, Christian city of Tikrit, thus virtually destroying the Assyrian Church of the East. Impartially, however, Tamerlane also slaughtered Shi’ite Muslims, Jews, and heathens.”<sup>6</sup>

**Native American Genocide** (16th – 20th centuries): The conquest and colonization of the Americas by various European powers beginning in the 16th century resulted in the near total destruction of the indigenous Native Americans through massacres, torture, biological warfare, sexual abuse, military conquest, ethnic cleansing, the forced removal of Native

American children to boarding schools, and suppression of Native American languages and religions. “The shared history of the hemisphere is one framed by the dual tragedies of genocide and slavery, both of which are part of the legacy of the European invasions of the past 500 years. Indigenous people north and south were displaced, died of disease, and were killed by Europeans through slavery, rape, and war. In 1491, about 145 million people lived in the western hemisphere. By 1691, the population of indigenous Americans had declined by 90–95 percent, or by around 130 million people.”<sup>7</sup>



## Transatlantic Slave Trade

(16th – 19th centuries): The transatlantic slave trade involved the systematic kidnapping of Africans by Europeans who forcibly transported them on slave ships (dubbed “floating concentration camps”<sup>8</sup>) chiefly to the Americas to be used as slaves in European colonies. The conditions aboard the slave ships were notoriously horrific, leading to the deaths of an estimated 15 percent (estimated between 1 to 2 million) of the captured Africans during the infamous “middle passage” of the voyage.<sup>9</sup>



BAND OF CAPTIVES DRIVEN INTO SLAVERY

*The 20th century was  
blighted with many*

# GENOCIDES

## **Armenian**

**Genocide:** In 1915 the Ottoman government began the systematic murder of the Armenian population. Before 1915, there were around 2 million Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire; by 1922 there were less than 400,000.



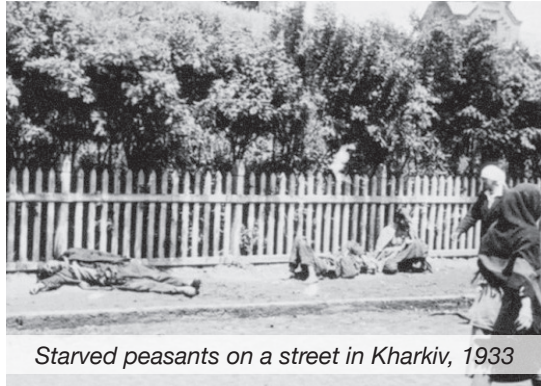
*Massacred Armenians*

The Armenians were a Christian minority living among a Muslim Turkish majority. Before the genocide, Christians were subjected to higher taxes and had less rights, legally and politically. Resentments against the Armenians grew along with political unrest in the region. On April 24, 1915, the genocide began. The Turkish government arrested and executed hundreds of Armenian intellectuals.<sup>10</sup> What followed included executions into mass graves, deportations, and death marches to concentration camps. These marches left many dead as they were exposed to harsh conditions, heat, and starvation as they made their way across the Syrian desert.<sup>11</sup>

**Ukrainian Genocide (Holodomor):** Between 1932 and 1933, the Soviet Union, led by dictator Joseph Stalin, organized an artificial famine against the Ukrainians that led to the deaths of an estimated 3.3 to 7.5 million people. The Ukrainian word for this period is Holodomor, meaning “to kill by starvation.” The Soviets sought to force Ukrainian farmers off their land and into



agricultural collectives. After the Ukrainians resisted the policy, the communist government instituted policies and actions resulting in the mass starvation.<sup>12</sup>



*Starved peasants on a street in Kharkiv, 1933*

## “Final Solution to the Jewish Question”

**(Holocaust):** In 1933 the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (“Nazi” for short), led by Adolf Hitler, came to power through elections in Germany. Central to Nazi ideology is a worldview that imagines “the Jews” as the arch enemy of the white “Aryan race.” The Holocaust is defined as the “murder of approximately 6 million Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators. Between the German invasion of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941 and the end of the war in Europe in May 1945, Nazi Germany and its accomplices strove to murder every Jew under their domination. Because Nazi discrimination against the Jews began with Hitler’s accession to power in January 1933, many historians consider this the start of the Holocaust era. The Jews were not the only victims of Hitler’s regime, but they were the only group that the Nazis sought to destroy entirely.”<sup>13</sup>



## **Cambodian**

**Genocide:** It began in the middle of the 1970s. At this time, Cambodia was ruled by the Communist Khmer Rouge regime, led by dictator Pol Pot. “It is estimated that between 1.7 and 2 million Cambodians died during the four-year reign of the Khmer Rouge” or “25% of the country’s population.”<sup>14</sup> Many died from disease, starvation, and abuse at labor camps or were executed as enemies of the state.<sup>15</sup>



*Skulls of victims of the Cambodian genocide*

## **Kurdish Genocide:**

In 1986 the regime of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, leader of the Arab Socialist Ba’ath Party, perpetrated a genocide against Iraq’s Kurdish minority. Called the Anfal Campaign, Iraqi forces carried out “a mammoth campaign of civic annihilation, displacement and mass killing” of an estimated 182,000 Kurds, mostly civilians.<sup>16</sup> The campaign was led by General Ali Hassan al Majid, nicknamed “Chemical Ali” for his use of chemical weapons against Kurdish civilians. On March 16, 1988, the Iraqi military dropped chemical weapons on the Kurdish village of Halabja, killing an estimated 5,000 civilians “from the lethal mix of mustard gas, sarin and VX nerve agent.”<sup>17</sup> Saddam’s forces destroyed about 4,500 Kurdish villages, plus another 31 Assyrian villages, displacing 1 million people.



*Human remains found at a mass grave site in Iraqi Kurdistan, July 15, 2005*

**Bosnian Genocide:** In 1991, Yugoslavia, a communist state comprised of a half-dozen nationalities, broke up into separate states. In April 1992, the newly formed Serbian Republic began

the systematic removal of all Bosnian Muslims in a campaign of what the Serbs called “ethnic cleansing.” The Serbian military forced many Bosnians into concentration camps, where women and girls were systematically raped, and others were tortured and murdered. In 1995, in Srebrenica, the Serbs committed a massacre against Muslim men and boys of “battle age,” murdering 8,000.<sup>18</sup> Throughout the war, Serb forces committed numerous mass executions of civilians. The Serb forces systematically raped thousands of women and girls throughout. This is called genocidal rape, the act of mass rape against a perceived enemy as part of a genocidal campaign.<sup>19</sup>



**Rwandan Genocide:** It began in the spring of 1994 and continued for 100 days, during which some 800,000 Tutsis were murdered, “making history as the quickest killing spree the world has ever seen.”<sup>20</sup> “One hundred thousand children were orphaned, abducted, or abandoned.”<sup>21</sup> The genocide, which included genocidal rape, was carried out by the Hutu majority against the Tutsi minority. The backdrop was a civil war waged by the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) against the dictatorship of Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana, a Hutu. The boiling point was reached when the president’s airplane was shot down on April 6, 1994. Members of the core Hutu political elite, many in top positions of the government, blamed all Tutsis and began an anti-Tutsi propaganda campaign over the radio. Within a day, the Hutus targeted all Tutsis and moderate Hutus for death.<sup>22</sup>



# GENOCIDE

## *continues in the 21st century*

Genocides continue to occur in the 21st century. Two have been documented:

**Yazidi Genocide:** In 2014 the Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS) carried out large-scale massacres that have been recognized by the UN as a genocide of the non-Muslim Yazidi Kurdish minority of northern Iraq. The genocide included mass executions, ethnic cleansing, forced conversions to Islam, and sexual slavery of thousands of Yazidi women and girls.<sup>23</sup>



Yazidi refugees

**Rohingya Genocide:** In 2017 the Myanmar military along with Buddhist extremists began committing atrocities against the Rohingya people, a stateless ethnic group in Myanmar that is predominantly Muslim. The violence included mass killings of Rohingya civilians, looting and destruction of Rohingya villages, gang rapes, and other sexual violence. Some 10,000 Rohingya people were killed and 392 villages destroyed. Over 900,000 Rohingya refugees fled to Bangladesh.<sup>24</sup>



Rohingya refugees

# *Preventing future* **GENOCIDES**

Genocides are not inevitable. They can be stopped even before they begin. It takes the will to stop them, however.

After the Nazi genocide of the Jews, the Holocaust, the Jewish people vowed “never again.” For anyone. The hope and demand, is no more genocides.

Unfortunately, the international community, including democratic states, permitted other genocides to take place with little to no action. And so far in the 21st century, genocides continue.

Humanity is now equipped with the knowledge of how genocides begin with words of hate, which in due course can lead to hate crimes and, if left unchecked, genocide.

Stopping the hate starts with each and every one of us.



# Photos

Page 7: “Group of men and women being taken to a slave market Wellcome V0050647.jpg” by wellcomeimages, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Group\_of\_men\_and\_women\_being\_taken\_to\_a\_slave\_market\_Wellcome\_V0050647.jpg,, creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.en; Page 10: “Iraqi mass grave.jpg,” commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Iraqi\_mass\_grave.jpg, creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/deed.en; Page 11: “Srebrenica massacre memorial gravestones 2009 1.jpg” by Michael Bükler, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Srebrenica\_massacre\_memorial\_gravestones\_2009\_1.jpg, creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en; Page 11: “Never Again - With Display of Skulls of Victims - Courtyard of Genocide Memorial Church - Karongi-Kibuye - Western Rwanda - 02.jpg” by Adam Jones, Ph.D., commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Never\_Again\_-\_With\_Display\_of\_Skulls\_of\_Victims\_-\_Courtyard\_of\_Genocide\_Memorial\_Church\_-\_Karongi-Kibuye\_-\_Western\_Rwanda\_-\_02.jpg, creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en; Page 12: “Yazidi refugees.jpg” by DFID - UK Department for International Development (picture: Rachel Unkovic/International Rescue Committee), commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Yazidi\_refugees.jpg, creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/deed.en

# Endnotes

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