



© The Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide



Imagine....

- ... being attacked by your neighbours
- ... the world doing nothing to stop the killing of millions
- ... making a positive stand against genocide through remembrance

The Holocaust and the Nazi attempt to eradicate the Jews of Europe horrified the world and led to new international laws aimed at preventing genocide and protecting human rights.

2008 marks the 65th anniversary of the definition of "genocide" by Polish-Jewish lawyer Raphael Lemkin who lost 49 members of his family during the Holocaust. Lemkin campaigned for many years to have genocide recognised as a crime under international law – a campaign which began before the Holocaust, based initially on the experiences of Assyrians and Armenians. The full definition of genocide can be found at www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/p_genoci.htm

In 1948 the United Nations adopted the term genocide and passed the "Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide" resolution.

Despite the horrors of the Holocaust and pledges to prevent a repeat of such events, the past 65 years have seen millions of people killed in genocides and atrocities across the world.

1975 – 1978: Cambodia

Between 1975 and 1978 Cambodia's communist rulers, the Khmer Rouge, murdered approximately 2 million people (about 25% of the population). Different ethnic and religious groups were targeted under this regime. These included the Vietnamese, Chinese, Muslim Cham, Buddhists and Christians, however the Khmer Rouge claimed that national minorities made up only 1% of the population. The statistical destruction of these minorities was followed by physical destruction; the Vietnamese community was entirely destroyed and the ethnic Chinese population fell from 425,000 to 200,000.

Buddhism was eliminated and by 1977 there were no functioning monasteries and no visible monks left in Cambodia. Religious activity by the Muslim Cham was prohibited and many Muslims were murdered for their refusal to eat pork. Of 113 community leaders only 20 survived and of 300 religious teachers approximately 270 were murdered.

The Khmer Rouge instigated policies to create a one-class society and executed opponents and suspected opponents of this goal. As the single class 'ideal' was a rural working class, those deemed to be 'educated' or 'intellectuals' were targeted for execution and inhabitants of cities were removed to the countryside and forced to work on farms. Many died from exhaustion or starvation.

Loung Ung was born in 1970 to a middle-class family in Phnom Penh. Her family was forced out of the city and she lost her parents and two siblings in the genocide. She is now a writer and human rights activist. In her book "First They Killed My Father" she describes experiences of families such as her own.

"Strange things are going on in the village as entire families disappear overnight. Kim says the Khmer Rouge terror has taken a new toll. The soldiers are executing the entire families of those whom they've taken away, including young children. The Angkar fears the survivors and children of the men they have killed will rise up one day and take their revenge. To eliminate this threat, they kill the entire family. We believe this to be the fate of another one of our neighbours, the Sarrin family."

1990s: Rwanda and Bosnia

In the 1990s genocides occurred just one year apart in Rwanda and Bosnia.

In 1994 in Rwanda approximately 1 million Tutsis and a number of moderate Hutus were murdered in just 100 days. The genocide was an attempt by extremists from the Hutu majority to eradicate Tutsis from the country. Despite the efforts by their Commander Lieutenant General Romeo Dallaire, the United Nations refused to allow their troops on the ground to stop the killing.

Only one year after the world watched the events in Rwanda genocide occurred in the Bosnian city of Srebrenica. 8,000 Bosnian Muslims were killed by members of the Serbian Army whose campaign in July 2005 included deportations, the use of rape as a weapon of war and mass murders. This was the first legally established case of genocide in Europe.

Today: Darfur

Since 2003 a fierce civil war has raged in the Darfur region of western Sudan. In this period between 200,000 and 400,000 civilians have been killed – targeted by the Sudanese Government and the Janjaweed militia. Both the American and French governments have described the situation in Darfur as genocide.

It is estimated that 2.5 million people have been displaced and are living in refugee camps and a further 2 million depend on humanitarian aid. Since July 2006 thirteen aid workers have been killed in Darfur.