

	Armenia	Holocaust	Cambodia	Bosnia	Rwanda	Sudan
Target Group			Cambodians			
Perpetrators			Khmer Rouge Political Party			
Leader			Pol Pot			
Year			1975-1979			
Number of Deaths:			1,200,000			
Synopsis (What and Why? Was there any international response?)			Pol Pot's attempt to form a Communist peasant farming society resulted in the deaths of 25 percent of the country's population from starvation, overwork, and executions			

Background on Genocide

The twentieth century was a violent century. Beyond the consequences of the world wars, the twentieth century was marked by many instances of genocide, torture, and human rights violations. While the Holocaust is the most widely remembered genocide in Europe, mass killings of large groups of people have disgraced the human record in a variety of human societies in the modern era as well as earlier periods of time.

Raphael Lemkin, a noted legal scholar, coined the term genocide in 1944. Lemkin, a Jewish immigrant to the United States from Poland, combined the Greek terms *genos* (race or tribe), and *cide* (killing). The United Nations (U.N.) developed a definition of genocide using Lemkin's work, provided examples of acts of genocide, and adopted a Genocide Convention in 1948. The United States signed the Genocide Convention on November 25, 1988.

The United Nations defined genocide as acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national ethnic, racial, or religious group. The following acts are U.N. examples of genocide:

- Killing members of the group
- Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group
- Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part
- Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
- Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group

Assessment:

Do countries have a responsibility to stop genocides in another country? Give reasons for your answer.

Armenian Genocide

In 1915, leaders of the Turkish government set in motion a plan to expel and massacre Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire. Though reports vary, most sources agree that there were about 2 million Armenians in the Ottoman Empire at the time of the massacre. By the early 1920s, when the massacres and deportations finally ended, some 1.5 million of Turkey's Armenians were dead, with many more forcibly removed from the country. Today, most historians call this event a genocide--a premeditated and systematic campaign to exterminate an entire people. However, the Turkish government does not acknowledge the enormity or scope of these events. Despite pressure from Armenians and social justice advocates throughout the world, it is still illegal in Turkey to talk about what happened to Armenians during this era.

The Roots of Genocide: The Ottoman Empire

The Armenian people have made their home in the Caucasus region of Eurasia for some 3,000 years. For some of that time, the kingdom of Armenia was an independent entity--at the beginning of the 4th century AD, for instance, it became the first nation in the world to make Christianity its official religion--but for the most part, control of the region shifted from one empire to another. During the 15th century, Armenia was absorbed into the mighty Ottoman Empire.

The Ottoman rulers, like most of their subjects, were Muslim. They permitted religious minorities like the Armenians to maintain some autonomy, but they also subjected Armenians, who they viewed as "infidels," to unequal and unjust treatment. Christians had to pay higher taxes than Muslims, for example, and they had very few political and legal rights.

In spite of these obstacles, the Armenian community thrived under Ottoman rule. They tended to be better educated and wealthier than their Turkish neighbors, who in turn tended to resent their success. This resentment was compounded by suspicions that the Christian Armenians would be more loyal to Christian governments (that of the Russians, for example, who shared an unstable border with Turkey) than they were to the Ottoman caliphate.

These suspicions grew more acute as the Ottoman Empire crumbled. At the end of the 19th century, the despotic Turkish Sultan Abdul Hamid II--obsessed with loyalty above all, and infuriated by the nascent Armenian campaign to win basic civil rights--declared that he would solve the "Armenian question" once and for all. "I will soon settle those Armenians," he told a reporter in 1890. "I will give them a box on the ear which will make them...relinquish their revolutionary ambitions."

The First Armenian Massacre

Between 1894 and 1896, this “box on the ear” took the form of a state-sanctioned pogrom. In response to large scale protests by Armenians, Turkish military officials, soldiers and ordinary men sacked Armenian villages and cities and massacred their citizens. Hundreds of thousands of Armenians were murdered.

The Rise of the Young Turks

In 1908, a new government came to power in Turkey. A group of reformers who called themselves the “Young Turks” overthrew Sultan Abdul Hamid and established a more modern constitutional government. At first, the Armenians were hopeful that they would have an equal place in this new state, but they soon learned that what the nationalistic Young Turks wanted most of all was to “Turkify” the empire. According to this way of thinking, non-Turks--and especially Christian non-Turks--were a grave threat to the new state

World War I

In 1914, the Turks entered World War I on the side of Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. (At the same time, Ottoman religious authorities declared jihad, or holy war, against all Christians except their allies.) Military leaders began to argue that the Armenians were traitors: If they thought they could win independence if the Allies were victorious, this argument went, the Armenians would be eager to fight for the enemy. As the war intensified, Armenians organized volunteer battalions to help the Russian army fight against the Turks in the Caucasus region. These events, and general Turkish suspicion of the Armenian people, led the Turkish government to push for the “removal” of the Armenians from the war zones along the Eastern Front.

Genocide Begins

On April 24, 1915, the Armenian genocide began. That day, the Turkish government arrested and executed several hundred Armenian intellectuals. After that, ordinary Armenians were turned out of their homes and sent on death marches through the Mesopotamian desert without food or water. Frequently, the marchers were stripped naked and forced to walk under the scorching sun until they dropped dead. People who stopped to rest were shot.

At the same time, the Young Turks created a “Special Organization,” which in turn organized “killing squads” or “butcher battalions” to carry out, as one officer put it, “the liquidation of the Christian elements.” These killing squads were often made up of murderers and other ex-convicts. They drowned people in rivers, threw them off cliffs, crucified them and burned them alive. In short order, the Turkish countryside was littered with Armenian corpses.

Records show that during this “Turkification” campaign government squads also kidnapped children, converted them to Islam and gave them to Turkish families. In some places, they raped women and forced them to join Turkish “harems” or serve as slaves. Muslim families moved into the homes of deported Armenians and seized their property.

In 1922, when the genocide was over, there were just 388,000 Armenians remaining in the Ottoman Empire.

The Armenian Genocide Today

After the Ottomans surrendered in 1918, the leaders of the Young Turks fled to Germany, which promised not to prosecute them for the genocide. (However, a group of Armenian nationalists devised a plan, known as Operation Nemesis, to track down and assassinate the leaders of the genocide.) Ever since then, the Turkish government has denied that a genocide took place. The Armenians were an enemy force, they argue, and their slaughter was a necessary war measure. Today, Turkey is an important ally of the U.S. and other Western nations, and so their governments have likewise been reluctant to condemn the long-ago killings. In March 2010, a U.S. Congressional panel at last voted to recognize the genocide.

The Holocaust

The word "Holocaust," from the Greek words "holos" (whole) and "kaustos" (burned), was historically used to describe a sacrificial offering burned on an altar. Since 1945, the word has taken on a new and horrible meaning: the mass murder of some 6 million European Jews (as well as members of some other persecuted groups, such as Gypsies and homosexuals) by the German Nazi regime during the Second World War. To the anti-Semitic Nazi leader Adolf Hitler, Jews were an inferior race, an alien threat to German racial purity and community. After years of Nazi rule in Germany, during which Jews were consistently persecuted, Hitler's "final solution"--now known as the Holocaust--came to fruition under the cover of world war, with mass killing centers constructed in the concentration camps of occupied Poland.

Nazi Revolution in Germany, 1933–1939

In 1933, Jews in Germany numbered around 525,000, or only 1 percent of the total German population. During the next six years, Nazis undertook an "Aryanization" of Germany, dismissing non-Aryans from civil service, liquidating Jewish-owned businesses and stripping Jewish lawyers and doctors of their clients. Under the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, anyone with three or four Jewish grandparents was considered a Jew, while those with two Jewish grandparents were designated Mischlinge (half-breeds). Under the Nuremberg Laws, Jews became routine targets for stigmatization and persecution. This culminated in Kristallnacht, or the "night of broken glass" in November 1938, when German synagogues were burned and windows in Jewish shops were smashed; some 100 Jews were killed and thousands more arrested. From 1933 to 1939, hundreds of thousands of Jews who were able to leave Germany did, while those who remained lived in a constant state of uncertainty and fear.

Towards the "Final Solution" , 1940–1941

Throughout the spring and summer of 1940, the German army expanded Hitler's empire in Europe, conquering Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and France. Beginning in 1941, Jews from all over the continent, as well as hundreds of thousands of European Gypsies, were transported to the Polish ghettos. The German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 marked a new level of brutality in warfare. Mobile killing units called Einsatzgruppen would murder more than 500,000 Soviet Jews and others (usually by shooting) over the course of the German occupation.

A memorandum dated July 31, 1941, from Hitler's top commander Hermann Goering to Reinhard Heydrich, chief of the SD (the security service of the SS), referred to the need for an Endlösung (final solution) to "the Jewish question." Beginning in September 1941, every person designated as a Jew in German-held territory was marked with a yellow star, making them open targets. Tens of thousands were soon being deported to the Polish ghettos and German-occupied cities in the USSR. Since June 1941, experiments with mass killing methods had been ongoing at the concentration camp of Auschwitz, near Krakow. That August, 500 officials gassed 500 Soviet POWs to death with the pesticide Zyklon-B. The SS soon placed a huge order for the gas with a German pest-control firm, an ominous indicator of the coming Holocaust.

Holocaust Death Camps, 1941-1945

Beginning in late 1941, the Germans began mass transports from the ghettos in Poland to the concentration camps, starting with those people viewed as the least useful: the sick, old and weak and the very young. The first mass gassings began at the camp of Belzec, near Lublin, on March 17, 1942. Five more mass killing centers were built at camps in occupied Poland, including Chelmno, Sobibor, Treblinka, Majdanek and the largest of all, Auschwitz-Birkenau. From 1942 to 1945, Jews were deported to the camps from all over Europe, including German-controlled territory as well as those countries allied with Germany. The heaviest deportations took place during the summer and fall of 1942, when more than 300,000 people were deported from the Warsaw ghetto alone.

Though the Nazis tried to keep operation of camps secret, the scale of the killing made this virtually impossible. Eyewitnesses brought reports of Nazi atrocities in Poland to the Allied governments, who were harshly criticized after the war for their failure to respond, or to publicize news of the mass slaughter. This lack of action was likely mostly due to the Allied focus on winning the war at hand, but was also a result of the general incomprehension with which news of the Holocaust was met and the denial and disbelief that such atrocities could be occurring on such a scale. At Auschwitz alone, more than 2 million people were murdered in a process resembling a large-scale industrial operation. A large population of Jewish and non-Jewish inmates worked in the labor camp there; though only Jews were gassed, thousands of others died of starvation or disease. During the summer of 1944, even as the events of D-Day (June 6, 1944) and a Soviet offensive the same month spelled the beginning of the end for Germany in the war, a large proportion of Hungary's Jewish population was deported to Auschwitz, and as many as 12,000 Jews were killed every day.

Nazi Rule Comes to an End and Aftermath

By the spring of 1945, German leadership was dissolving amid internal dissent, with Goering and Himmler both seeking to distance themselves from Hitler and take power. In his last will and political testament, dictated in a German bunker that April 29, Hitler blamed the war on "International Jewry and its helpers" and urged the German leaders and people to follow "the strict observance of the racial laws and with merciless resistance against the universal poisoners of all peoples"--the Jews. The following day, he committed suicide. Germany's formal surrender in World War II came barely a week later, on May 8, 1945.

German forces had begun evacuating many of the death camps in the fall of 1944, sending inmates under guard to march further from the advancing enemy's front line. These so-called "death marches" continued all the way up to the German surrender, resulting in the deaths of some 250,000 to 375,000 people.

The wounds of the Holocaust--known in Hebrew as Shoah, or catastrophe--were slow to heal. Survivors of the camps found it nearly impossible to return home, as in many cases they had lost their families and been denounced by their non-Jewish neighbors. As a result, the late 1940s saw an unprecedented number of refugees, POWs and other displaced populations moving across Europe. In an effort to punish the villains of the Holocaust, the Allies held the Nuremberg Trials of 1945-46, which brought Nazi atrocities to horrifying light. Increasing pressure on the Allied powers to create a homeland for Jewish survivors of the Holocaust would lead to a mandate for the creation of Israel in 1948.

Bosnian Genocide

In April 1992, the government of the Yugoslav republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina declared its independence from Yugoslavia. Over the next several years, Bosnian Serb forces, with the backing of the Serb-dominated Yugoslav army, targeted both Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) and Croatian civilians for atrocious crimes resulting in the deaths of some 100,000 people (80 percent Bosniak) by 1995. It was the worst act of genocide since the Nazi regime's destruction of some 6 million European Jews during World War II.

Background

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Balkan states of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, Slovenia and Macedonia became part of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia. After the death of longtime Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito in 1980, growing nationalism among the different Yugoslav republics threatened to split their union apart. This process intensified after the mid-1980s with the rise of the Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic, who helped foment discontent between Serbians in Bosnia and Croatia and their Croatian, Bosniak and Albanian neighbors. In 1991, Slovenia, Croatia and Macedonia declared their independence; during the war in Croatia that followed, the Serb-dominated Yugoslav army supported Serbian separatists there in their brutal clashes with Croatian forces.

In Bosnia, Muslims represented the largest single population group by 1971. More Serbs and Croats emigrated over the next two decades, and in a 1991 census Bosnia's population of some 4 million was 44 percent Bosniak, 31 percent Serb, and 17 percent Croatian. Elections held in late 1990 resulted in a coalition government split between parties representing the three ethnicities (in rough proportion to their populations) and led by the Bosniak Alija Izetbegovic. As tensions built inside and outside the country, the Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and his Serbian Democratic Party withdrew from government and set up their own "Serbian National Assembly." On March 3, 1992, after a referendum vote (which Karadzic's party blocked in many Serb-populated areas), President Izetbegovic proclaimed Bosnia's independence.

Struggle for Control in Bosnia

Far from seeking independence for Bosnia, Bosnian Serbs wanted to be part of a dominant Serbian state in the Balkans--the "Greater Serbia" that Serbian separatists had long envisioned. In early May 1992, two days after the United States and the European Community (precursor to the European Union) recognized Bosnia's independence, Bosnian Serb forces with the backing of Milosevic and the Serb-dominated Yugoslav army launched their offensive with a bombardment of Bosnia's capital, Sarajevo. They attacked Bosniak-dominated town in eastern Bosnia, including Zvornik, Foca, and Visegrad, forcibly expelling Bosniak civilians from the region in a brutal process that later was identified as "ethnic cleansing." (Ethnic cleansing differs from genocide in that its primary goal is the expulsion of a group of people from a geographical area and not the actual physical destruction of that group, even though the same methods--including murder, rape, torture and forcible displacement--may be used.)

Though Bosnian government forces tried to defend the territory, sometimes with the help of the Croatian army, Bosnian Serb forces were in control of nearly three-quarters of the country by the end of 1993, and Karadzic's party had set up their own Republika Srpska in the east. Most of the Bosnian Croats had left the country, while a significant Bosniak population remained only in smaller towns. Several peace proposals between a Croatian-Bosniak federation and Bosnian Serbs failed when the Serbs refused to give up any territory. The United Nations (U.N.) refused to intervene in the conflict in Bosnia, but a campaign spearheaded by its High Commissioner for Refugees provided humanitarian aid to its many displaced, malnourished and injured victims.

Attack on Srebrenica: July 1995

By the summer of 1995, three towns in eastern Bosnia--Srebrenica, Zepa and Gorazde--remained under control of the Bosnian government. The U.N. had declared these enclaves "safe havens" in 1993, to be disarmed and protected by international peacekeeping forces. On July 11, however, Bosnian Serb forces advanced on Srebrenica, overwhelming a battalion of Dutch peacekeeping forces stationed there. Serbian forces subsequently separated the Bosniak civilians at Srebrenica, putting the women and girls on buses and sending them to Bosnian-held territory. Some of the women were raped or sexually assaulted, while the men and boys who remained behind were killed immediately or bussed to mass killing sites. Estimates of Bosniaks killed by Serb forces at Srebrenica range from around 7,000 to more than 8,000.

After Bosnian Serb forces captured Zepa that same month and exploded a bomb in a crowded Sarajevo market, the international community began to respond more forcefully to the ongoing conflict and its ever-growing civilian death toll. In August 1995, after the Serbs refused to comply with a U.N. ultimatum, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) joined efforts with Bosnian and Croatian forces for three weeks of bombing Bosnian Serb positions and a ground offensive. With Serbia's economy crippled by U.N. trade sanctions and its military forces under assault in Bosnia after three years of warfare, Milosevic agreed to enter negotiations that October. The U.S.-sponsored peace talks in Dayton, Ohio in November 1995 (which included Izetbegovic, Milosevic and Croatian President Franjo Tudjman) resulted in the creation of a federalized Bosnia divided between a Croat-Bosniak federation and a Serb republic.

International Response

Though the international community did little to prevent the systematic atrocities committed against Bosniaks and Croats in Bosnia while they were occurring, it did actively seek justice against those who committed them. In May 1993, the U.N. Security Council created the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) at The Hague, Netherlands. It was the first international tribunal since the Nuremberg Trials in 1945-46 and the first to prosecute genocide, among other war crimes. Radovan Karadzic and the Bosnian Serb military commander, General Ratko Mladic, were among those indicted by the ICTY for genocide and other crimes against humanity.

Over the better part of the next two decades, the ICTY charged more than 160 individuals of crimes committed during conflict in the former Yugoslavia. Brought before the tribunal in 2002 on charges of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, Slobodan Milosevic served as his own defense lawyer; his poor health led to

long delays in the trial until he was found dead in his prison cell in 2006. In 2007, the International Court of Justice issued its ruling in a historic civil lawsuit brought by Bosnia against Serbia. Though the court called the massacre at Srebrenica genocide and said that Serbia "could and should" have prevented it and punished those who committed it, it stopped short of declaring Serbia guilty of the genocide itself.

The Rwandan Genocide

From April to July 1994, members of the Hutu ethnic majority in the east-central African nation of Rwanda murdered as many as 800,000 people, mostly of the Tutsi minority. Begun by extreme Hutu nationalists in the capital of Kigali, the genocide spread throughout the country with staggering speed and brutality, as ordinary citizens were incited by local officials and the Hutu Power government to take up arms against their neighbors. By the time the Tutsi-led Rwandese Patriotic Front gained control of the country through a military offensive in early July, hundreds of thousands of Rwandans were dead and many more displaced from their homes. The RPF victory created 2 million more refugees (mainly Hutus) from Rwanda, exacerbating what had already become a full-blown humanitarian crisis.

Background: Ethnic Tensions in Rwanda

By the early 1990s, Rwanda, a small country with an overwhelmingly agricultural economy, had one of the highest population densities in Africa. About 85 percent of its population is Hutu; the rest is Tutsi, along with a small number of Twa, a Pygmy group who were the original inhabitants of Rwanda. Part of German East Africa from 1894 to 1918, Rwanda came under the League of Nations mandate of Belgium after World War I, along with neighboring Burundi. Rwanda's colonial period, during which the ruling Belgians favored the minority Tutsis over the Hutus, exacerbated the tendency of the few to oppress the many, creating a legacy of tension that exploded into violence even before Rwanda gained its independence. A Hutu revolution in 1959 forced as many as 300,000 Tutsis to flee the country, making them an even smaller minority. By early 1961, victorious Hutus had forced Rwanda's Tutsi monarch into exile and declared the country a republic. After a U.N. referendum that same year, Belgium officially granted independence to Rwanda in July 1962.

Ethnically motivated violence continued in the years following independence. In 1973, a military group installed Major General Juvenal Habyarimana, a moderate Hutu, in power. The sole leader of Rwandan government for the next two decades, Habyarimana founded a new political party, the National Revolutionary Movement for Development (NRMD). He was elected president under a new constitution ratified in 1978 and reelected in 1983 and 1988, when he was the sole candidate. In 1990, forces of the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), consisting mostly of Tutsi refugees, invaded Rwanda from Uganda. A ceasefire in these hostilities led to negotiations between the government and the RPF in 1992. In August 1993, Habyarimana signed an agreement at Arusha, Tanzania, calling for the creation of a transition government that would include the RPF. This power-sharing agreement angered Hutu extremists, who would soon take swift and horrible action to prevent it.

Genocide

On April 6, 1994, a plane carrying Habyarimana and Burundi's president Cyprien Ntaryamira was shot down over Kigali, leaving no survivors. (It has never been conclusively determined who the culprits were. Some have blamed Hutu extremists, while others blamed leaders of the RPF.) Within an hour of the plane crash, the Presidential Guard together with members of the Rwandan armed forces (FAR) and Hutu militia groups

known as the Interahamwe (“Those Who Attack Together”) and Impuzamugambi (“Those Who Have the Same Goal”) set up roadblocks and barricades and began slaughtering Tutsis and moderate Hutus with impunity. Among the first victims of the genocide were the moderate Hutu Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana and her 10 Belgian bodyguards, killed on April 7. This violence created a political vacuum, into which an interim government of extremist Hutu Power leaders from the military high command stepped on April 9.

The mass killings in Rwanda quickly spread from Kigali to the rest of the country, with some 800,000 people slaughtered over the next three months. During this period, local officials and government-sponsored radio stations called on ordinary Rwandan civilians to murder their neighbors. Meanwhile, the RPF resumed fighting, and civil war raged alongside the genocide. By early July, RPF forces had gained control over most of country, including Kigali. In response, more than 2 million people, nearly all Hutus, fled Rwanda, crowding into refugee camps in the Congo (then called Zaire) and other neighboring countries.

After its victory, the RPF established a coalition government similar to that agreed upon at Arusha, with Pasteur Bizimungu, a Hutu, as president and Paul Kagame, a Tutsi, as vice president and defense minister. Habyarimana's NRMD party, which had played a key role in organizing the genocide, was outlawed, and a new constitution adopted in 2003 eliminated reference to ethnicity. The new constitution was followed by Kagame's election to a 10-year term as Rwanda's president and the country's first-ever legislative elections.

International Response

As in the case of atrocities committed in the former Yugoslavia around the same time, the international community largely remained on the sidelines during the Rwandan genocide. A U.N. Security Council vote in April 1994 led to the withdrawal of most of a U.N. peacekeeping operation (UNAMIR) created the previous fall to aid with governmental transition under the Arusha accord. As reports of the genocide spread, the Security Council voted in mid-May to supply a more robust force, including more than 5,000 troops. By the time that force arrived in full, however, the genocide had been over for months. In a separate French intervention approved by the U.N., French troops entered Rwanda from Zaire in late June. In the face of the RPF's rapid advance, they limited their intervention to a "humanitarian zone" set up in southwestern Rwanda, saving tens of thousands of Tutsi lives but also helping some of the genocide's plotters--allies of the French during the Habyarimana administration--to escape.

In the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide, many prominent figures in the international community lamented the outside world's general obliviousness to the situation and its failure to act in order to prevent the atrocities from taking place. As former U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali told the PBS news program "Frontline": "The failure of Rwanda is 10 times greater than the failure of Yugoslavia. Because in Yugoslavia the international community was interested, was involved. In Rwanda nobody was interested." Attempts were later made to rectify this passivity. After the RPF victory, the UNAMIR operation was brought back up to strength; it remained in Rwanda until March 1996, as one of the largest humanitarian relief efforts in history.

In October 1994, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), located in Tanzania, was established as an extension of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) at The Hague, the first international tribunal since the Nuremburg Trials of 1945-46 and the first with the mandate to prosecute the crime of genocide. In 1995, the ICTR began indicting and trying a number of higher-ranking people for their role in the Rwandan genocide; the process was made more difficult because the whereabouts of many suspects were unknown. The trials continued over the next decade and a half, including the 2008 conviction of three former senior Rwandan defense and military officials for organizing the genocide.

The Darfur Conflict

In early 2003, the struggle for land and power in the western Sudanese region of Darfur erupted into violence between Sudanese government forces and rebel groups protesting the marginalization of the region's black African ethnic groups by the Muslim central government. Arab militias (Janjaweed) supported by the government soon began enacting policies of ethnic cleansing--including forced displacement and starvation, murder, torture and rape--against Darfur's civilian population, leaving hundreds of thousands of people dead and more than 2 million expelled from their homes.

Background: Civil War in Sudan

The northern African country of Sudan is Africa's biggest country, with a population of some 41 million and a land area that represents more than 8 percent of the African continent. Its population is also one of the most diverse in Africa, divided by religion, ethnicity, tribal differences and economic disparities. Though most of Sudan's natural resources--including oil, first discovered in 1978--are located in the south, that region is still desperately impoverished, with political power centralized in the north, among a relatively small group of Arabic-speaking Muslims in the capital city of Khartoum.

Except for a brief reprieve during the 1970s, Sudan has been at war since its independence from Great Britain in 1956, with most of the fighting involving the Islamic central government in the north and the largely Christian and Animist population of the south. The Addis Ababa Agreement of 1972 ended the first Sudanese civil war, giving the south political and economic autonomy. War broke out again in the early 1980s, after measures issued from Khartoum imposed Sharia (Islamic law) over the entire country and made Arabic its official language. This time, southern resisters led by the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) called not for autonomy but for Sudan to become a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious state. The war intensified over the next two decades, after Brigadier General Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir took power in a military coup in June 1989 and consolidated control under a National Islamic Front-supported government.

Conflict in Darfur

In Darfur, a western region of Sudan, the non-Arab population had also suffered ongoing political and economic marginalization by the government in Khartoum. Frustration and anger at this situation exploded into violence in the spring of 2003, when rebel groups called the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) attacked government installations in Darfur. In response, the Sudanese government recruited local Arab militias, known as Janjaweed (spelled variously as Jingaweit or Janjawid), who themselves had interest in gaining control over territory occupied by the rebel Fur, Zaghawa and Masaalit ethnic groups. Within a year, "scorched earth" tactics like the bombing of hospitals, clinics, schools and other civilian sites and systematic targeting of civilians for displacement, murder, torture and rape had left tens of thousands dead, while hundreds of thousands of others fled westward to neighboring Chad.

A ceasefire declared in 2004 and the arrival of African Union (A.U.) troops in Darfur failed to stop the violence and the ensuing humanitarian crisis in the region. In January 2005, the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) formally ended the Sudanese civil war between north and south, but the conflict in Darfur lay outside of the accord. In July 2007, the United Nations authorized a joint U.N.-A.U. peacekeeping mission to replace the A.U. mission, though troop deployment did not begin until 2008. By 2009, the U.N. estimated that some 300,000 people had been killed and 2.7 million displaced since 2004.

Ongoing International Response

Over the course of the 1990s, the Sudanese government's support for Iraq during the first Gulf War and various radical Islamist movements (including its hosting of Osama Bin Laden from 1992-96) resulted in increased isolation from Western governments. In 1993, the United States placed Sudan on its list of state sponsors of terrorism; it began imposing sanctions on the country in 1997. In September 2004, the U.S. government classified the ongoing atrocities in Darfur as genocide; the following March, the U.N. Security Council referred the case to the International Criminal Court (I.C.C.), a permanent court created in 1998 to prosecute war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. In early 2009, the I.C.C. issued an arrest warrant for Bashir for war crimes and crimes against humanity (but not genocide). It was the first time that the I.C.C., established in 1998, had sought the arrest of a sitting head of state.

Among the crimes of which the Sudanese government stands accused is the obstruction of vital humanitarian aid, on which nearly half of Darfur's population of 6 million people depends. For its part, the Sudanese government has repeatedly rejected the charges against it. In response to Bashir's indictment by the I.C.C., Khartoum ordered 13 international aid organizations to suspend their operations, due to charges that they provided false evidence to the court. In addition to the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Darfur, the increasingly fragile peace brokered in 2005 threatened to erupt into renewed violence, with both sides--Bashir's government in the north and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement in the semi-autonomous south--clashing over a number of issues, including control over oil-rich southern regions.