

chapter four
from nuremberg to the
killing fields of cambodia

Although Lemkin had been warning about genocide for twenty years, even he couldn't conceive the full extent of the horrors that had occurred in Europe. When he traveled to Nuremberg, Germany, in 1946, he learned that of fifty-three family members in Poland, forty-nine were dead.

Lemkin was not just in Nuremberg to learn about his family. He hoped to influence a war tribunal that had set up its court in the ancient German city to judge and pass sentence on former Nazi officials for war crimes. Hitler had committed suicide just days before the war ended, but other top Nazis had been captured, arrested, and charged. Such a court was virtually unprecedented, and Lemkin saw it as an opportunity to get his word—genocide—into the vocabulary of international law.

International law is extremely complex, but for our purposes, it is important to remember one basic concept—sovereignty. The modern world is mostly organized as nations. Each nation is recognized as being sovereign; that is, it is allowed to run its affairs without direct interference from other nations. This is the bedrock of international law. A country can't simply invade another country if there is no legitimate reason to do so. But what about when a country starts murdering its own citizens? Lemkin brought this up to his professor when he was a young student. The professor used the example of a farmer killing his own chickens. The farmer had the right to do as he pleased with

his own chickens on his own farm. In other words, the law that prevents one country from attacking another is stronger than any obligation to a higher law—such as human rights.

Lemkin thought that this was completely wrong. He argued that countries are most obligated to intervene in other countries when these kinds of actions are occurring. This was a radical idea. When countries attack others, they are making war. Lemkin's concept seemed to encourage the idea that war is justified to stop genocide.



Sitting in a box surrounded by guards, the Nazi defendants at the Nuremberg trials await justice. Hermann Göring (front left), one of the main leaders of Nazi Germany, worriedly leans forward and chews on his fingernails. Later, he was sentenced to death but avoided execution by committing suicide in his cell in 1946.

At Nuremberg Lemkin cornered lawyers and judges and spoke to them about his concepts. Some brushed him off, and others listened patiently, but his ideas were not accepted. When the Nazis were charged with crimes, it did not include the ones they had perpetrated on other Germans. By this logic, the Nazis could be found guilty for murdering Polish Jews, but not German Jews.

Nonetheless, Lemkin did win some victories. His relentless lobbying led to the use of the word *genocide* in one of the indictments, the first mention of the word in an international legal setting. However, when the Nuremberg tribunal finished, the Nazis were convicted of various crimes against peace and humanity, but genocide was not among them. Lemkin later called it “the blackest day” of his life, but he did not sink into despair. Hearing that the new world organization—the United Nations—was meeting in New York, he hurried aboard a flight back to the United States.

“We Must Change the World!”

In 1946 the United Nations was still in its infancy and Lemkin was determined that preventing genocide be included among the priorities of the new world body. Passionate, intense, and tireless, Lemkin pursued the individuals at the UN with what one writer called a “relentless appetite for rejection.” He pigeonholed reporters and pitched endless variations on stories about genocide. When some grew weary and tried to avoid him, he chased down the halls after them, saying, “You and I, we must change the world!”

This time, Lemkin found a more willing audience. The war, the slaughter in Eastern Europe, and the images of

concentration camps were still in people’s minds. Lemkin, after all, had been warning this was going to happen long before World War II even started. Many delegates at the UN recognized this. In December 1946, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution that condemned genocide:

Genocide is a denial of the right of existence of entire human groups, as homicide is the denial of the right to live of individual human beings; such denial of the right of existence shocks the conscience of mankind, results in great losses to humanity in the form of cultural and other contributions represented by these human groups, and is contrary to moral law and to the spirit and aims of the United Nations.

Lemkin was satisfied with this result, but it was by no means the end of his efforts. The key, to him, was to make genocide against the law. This came back, however, to a familiar problem—whose law? Each country had its own laws, which applied within its own borders. And one country was not supposed to meddle with another’s internal laws.

Times, however, had changed. Many world leaders believed that the former way of doing things would not work in the future. Nations had to be ready to cooperate on an international level to resolve their differences. Another lesson was that one nation could not simply ignore what was happening in another country. If the various peoples of the world could agree on at least one thing, it was that another Holocaust should not be permitted.

This was the atmosphere in which the UN was founded and where Raphael Lemkin hoped to make his greatest mark. He wanted genocide to be against the law—a law that obligated one nation to intervene in another if genocide was occurring; a

law that would make anyone who committed genocide a fugitive in the world community. A colleague argued to Lemkin that law meant nothing. What dictator, the colleague said, would obey a piece of paper? "Only man has law," Lemkin replied with characteristic passion. "Law must be built, do you understand me? You must build the law!"

Lemkin broadened his studies on genocide. He researched any group that had been targeted because of its race or beliefs. These cases occurred over centuries—to Aztecs and Incas massacred by Spanish explorers, to French Huguenot Protestants persecuted by French Catholic authorities, to the Armenians slaughtered in the Ottoman Empire.

Largely because of Lemkin's efforts, the UN declared on December 9, 1948, that genocide was a crime when any act was committed with "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group." This included murder, acts of physical brutality and mental distress, deliberate starvation or other acts to destroy life, attempts to prevent births in the group, or the forcible transfer of children of the group to another group.

In an emotional ceremony in Paris, Lemkin watched as fifty-five delegates voted to approve the law, with none voting against. After receiving congratulations from various world leaders for his efforts, Lemkin retreated to a dark hall and wept. He gently rebuffed approaching journalists, telling them to "leave me sit here alone." His efforts had left him exhausted and deathly ill, but he could claim victory. He would later write that the law meant that his mother "and many millions did not die in vain."

But just what had Lemkin achieved? If genocide was occurring in a country, other countries were obligated to take measures to stop it. If this failed, however, nations could use force and intervene in another country's internal borders. This

was virtually unprecedented, and it created a new emphasis on law among nations, not just within them. "Relating to the sacred right of existence of human groups we are proclaiming today the supremacy of international law once and forever," said one official.

The Struggle for Ratification

With the passage of the law, however, it still had to be submitted and ratified, or formally approved, by each country's government. Many governments did ratify the law, but one in particular did not—the United States.

In the 1950s, the United States occupied an unfamiliar position as a world superpower. Many Americans, however, urged that the country return to a period of isolationism (as in the 1920s and 1930s) and not worry about the world's problems. Others urged confrontation with the other world power—the Soviet Union—and its system of Communism. These tensions erupted in criticisms of the genocide convention.

Some thought the law was too vague. After all, how many people had to be killed from a group before it could be declared genocide? Others wondered whether U.S. government treatment of Native Americans in the 1800s could also be punished under the law. Southern lawmakers grew concerned that segregation—laws that separated blacks and whites in social settings in many southern states—and lynchings of African Americans might also be considered genocide. Others refused to give up American sovereignty, or the right to dictate what happens within U.S. borders, to an international organization.

Lemkin went to work again. He knew that without U.S. participation, the law was doomed. The United States had not

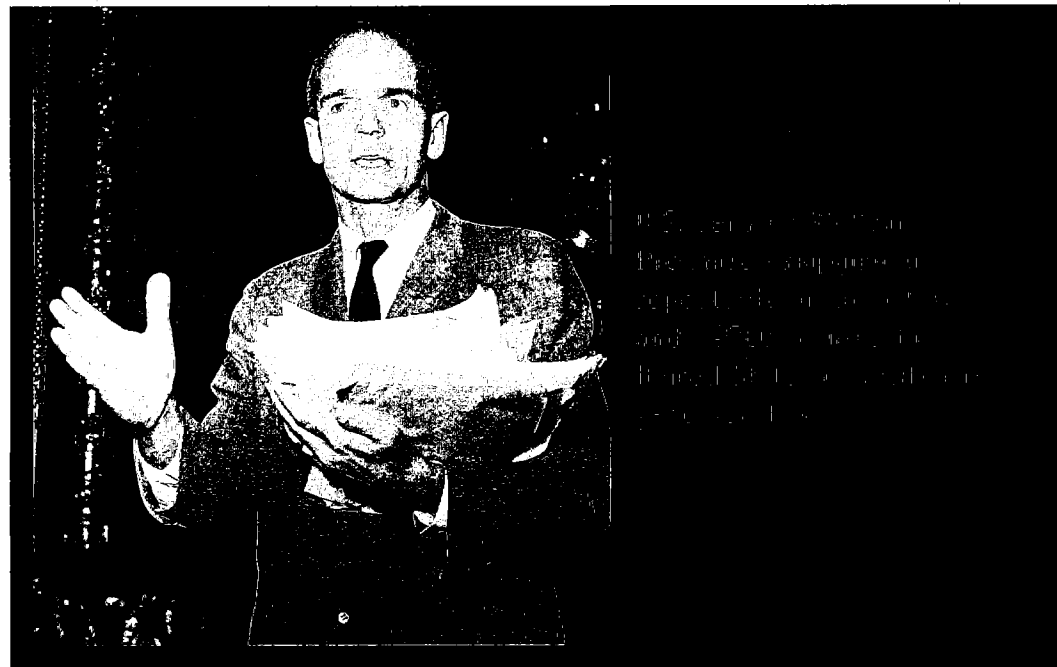
joined the League of Nations in the 1920s and 1930s, and as a result, the organization had largely failed. He sent letters to senators; he confronted lawmakers in the halls of the Capitol in Washington, D.C. As he had before the war, he spoke to small groups of concerned citizens—virtually anyone who would listen.

But the optimism and hope for international law that had bloomed following World War II faded. Lemkin's countless letters and personal appeals drew little or no response. An effort to write a four-volume work on genocide failed to win attention from publishers. Lemkin grew more frustrated and exhausted. On August 28, 1959, in New York City, he died of a sudden heart attack. Lemkin and the genocide law dropped from the U.S. political scene.

In January 1967, more than seven years after Lemkin's death, Wisconsin senator William Proxmire stood up in a nearly empty Senate chamber and gave a speech. He declared that the Senate's failure to ratify the genocide convention was a "national shame," and he was determined to give a speech each day urging the ratification.

Proxmire was a senator who had known defeat—he had run for the Wisconsin governorship three times and lost. But he was also cheerful even after repeated failures, and he never quit. The genocide convention was brought to his attention in the mid-1960s by a human rights lawyer. When Proxmire learned that seventy nations had ratified the genocide law and that the U.S. Senate had not, he was shocked. To Proxmire, it was inexcusable, and thus he resolved to start giving speeches in the Senate on a daily basis. In 1967 alone, he gave 199 different speeches on the genocide convention.

Proxmire persisted through the late 1960s and into the mid-1970s, when disturbing news emerged that a genocide was



U.S. Senator William Proxmire, speaking at a podium in the Senate and urging the ratification of the genocide convention.

occurring in Southeast Asia. In the early 1960s, the United States had intervened in a decadeslong civil war between North and South Vietnam. American policy makers supported South Vietnam against the Communist North, and when it appeared that South Vietnam was going to fall to the Communists, more than 500,000 U.S. soldiers were dispatched to fight. The result was a bloody quagmire that left the United States bitterly divided and North Vietnam undefeated. After suffering more than 50,000 dead, the United States withdrew its forces. South Vietnam collapsed just a few years later.

Even after the collapse of South Vietnam, peace did not come to the region. In one of South Vietnam's neighboring countries, Cambodia, a civil war still raged. Communist groups called the Khmer Rouge fought the government. In 1975 the Cambodian government was defeated and the Khmer Rouge seized power. Clad in black clothing, red and white-checkered



Khmer Rouge fighters celebrate the government takeover on April 17, 1975, as they enter Phnom Penh, the capital city of Cambodia.

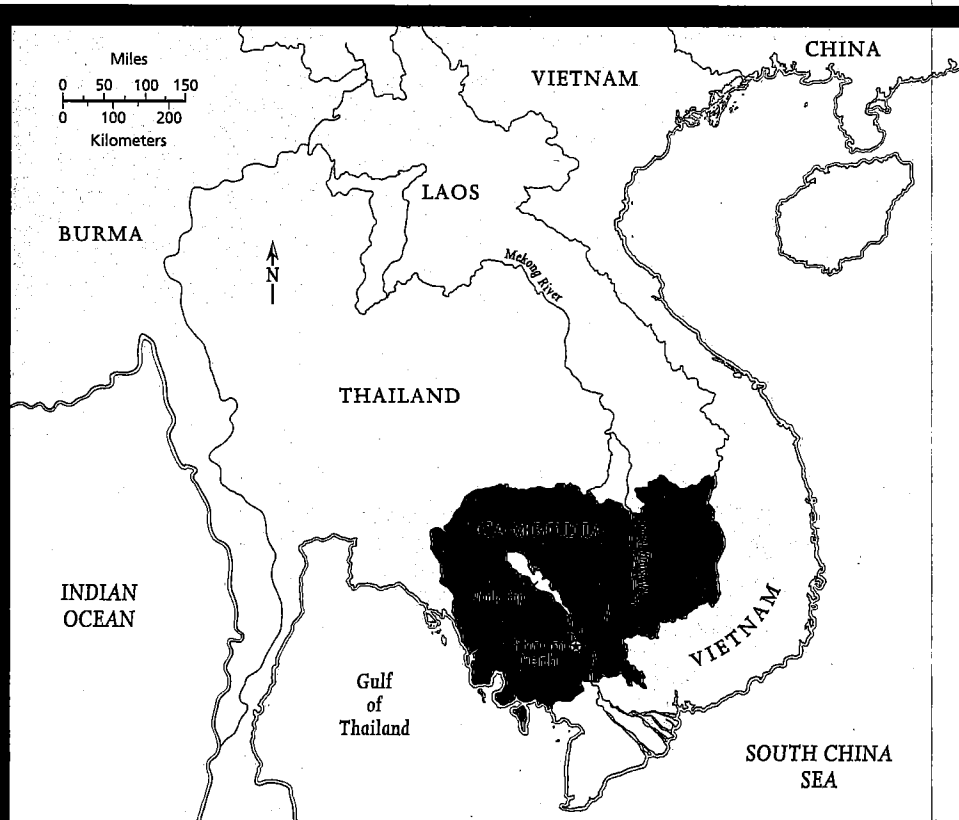
scarves, and sandals made from old tires, Khmer Rouge soldiers entered the country's capital city, Phnom Penh.

A Young Girl in Cambodia

Loung Ung was just five years old at the time. She was bewildered by mud-streaked trucks carrying the young soldiers, who pumped their fists skyward in elation. She walked home and asked her father, who was a captain in the military police, who the men were and why they were here. "They want us," he answered.

The Khmer Rouge were Communists who believed that people could be tainted—or corrupted—by exposure to different ideas, especially from the capitalist West. In very simple terms, the Communists were trying to create a society in which no one competed against another and all people worked for the common good. In theory, this meant that there were no rich to exploit the poor, and people would not starve or be left without the means to support themselves. Capitalism, said Communists, was designed to crush the workers for the enrichment of a tiny minority.

But Communism had proved extremely difficult to create in reality. Some people refused to give up their property or to obey



This map shows the location of Cambodia and its capital city, Phnom Penh.

the Communists. Some people worked too hard; others, too little. The Communist government was supposed to organize the economy, but leaders often made bad decisions and couldn't manage a complex system in which millions of people exchanged goods every day.

One of the problems, said Communists, was that some people actively worked against the Communist system. These people had been exposed to capitalist ideas and thus wouldn't give up their greedy desires to get rich or to undermine the Communist government. This thinking, according to the Khmer Rouge, meant that illiterate peasants in the countryside were more pure than the occupants of a city—the “bourgeois”—where people had been exposed to the ideas of the capitalist elements.

The solution, the Khmer Rouge ultimately decided, was to rid the society of these corrupt elements—to purify the system by eliminating the people who were holding it back. This meant either “reeducating” people about their faults or getting rid of the people altogether. “They were killing anyone who wore glasses, because if they wore glasses it suggested they knew how to read, and if they knew how to read, it suggested they had been infected with the bourgeois virus,” recalled Congressman Stephen Solarz, who traveled to Southeast Asia after the Khmer Rouge took control of Cambodia.

On April 17, 1975, on the same day that Ung saw the Khmer Rouge soldiers enter Phnom Penh, trucks carrying loudspeakers roamed through the streets, warning everyone to leave. The messages claimed that U.S. bombers were en route to destroy the city and that everyone had to evacuate. Ung, along with her parents and six siblings, joined the hundreds of thousands crowded on the highways leading into the countryside.

At checkpoints, Khmer Rouge soldiers asked questions to weed out those who had been “infected” by capitalism or who had a connection with the former rulers. Ung's father, though a military police officer, was able to convince a guard that he was in fact a farmer. They passed through, and eventually settled in a village.



A Khmer Rouge soldier in a village in Cambodia, 1975. The soldier is holding a rifle and is looking at the camera.

Soon after their arrival, they and several other resettled families gathered to hear a speech from the village chief, who stood with two armed guards behind him. In the village, he explained, everyone lives by strict rules. “One of our rules applies to how we dress,” he continued. “As you see, we wear

the same clothes. Everyone wears his or her hair in the same style. By wearing the same thing, we rid ourselves of the corrupt Western creation of vanity."

A guard snatched a bag from a woman and grimaced with disgust at the colorful clothes inside. The guards moved among the families, taking bags of modern clothing. They made a pile and set it aflame. Ung, whose prized red dress was among the pile, stared with rage and mourning.

The chief told them that their thoughts had to be cleansed. They were to drop all formal words such as sir or Mr. or Mrs. The chief dismissed such words as "bad habits and fancy titles" brought to Cambodia by evil foreigners. Instead, everyone was to use the word *met* preceding a person's name. Other words—such as *dad* and *mom*—were declared illegal.

"I hold on to Pa's finger even tighter as the chief rants off other new words," recalled Ung. "The new Khmer have better words for eating, sleeping, working, stranger; all designed to make us equal."

No one is allowed to own anything, said the chief. Everything is owned by the high government—Angkar. Everyone is ordered to eat together; if anyone does not work or is lazy or late for work, then he or she will receive nothing. The families were ordered to live together in houses. Children will be educated, but only in schools approved by the Angkar. "Children in our society will not attend school just to have their brains cluttered with useless information," he said. A similar message was being delivered to millions of shocked, disoriented, and terrified people across Cambodia.

Over the next months, the transplanted Cambodians—the "new people" as they were called—were put to work. They spent their days working in the rice fields and their nights listening to lectures about life under Angkar. For many of the

villagers, there was no radio, no television, no newspapers, or other contact with the outside world. In many areas, food grew scarce, and the new people grew thin, dirty, and diseased. All the while, the Khmer Rouge patrolled the villages day and night. They listened for anyone whispering against the regime and sought out former soldiers or employees of the previous government. Some were able to hide their identity for months and even years, but the Khmer Rouge were relentless and ruthless. Fear and starvation spread over the countryside, and thousands of people began to disappear.

The leader of the Angkar was a shadowy and secretive figure, Saloth Sar, now known to the world as Pol Pot. Pol Pot was determined to remake Cambodia according to his twisted vision. While much of this had to do with Communism, he also believed deeply that Cambodia was to recover the power and glory it had enjoyed hundreds of years before. This meant



Communist leader Pol Pot, now known to the world as Pol Pot, was determined to remake Cambodia according to his twisted vision. While much of this had to do with Communism, he also believed deeply that Cambodia was to recover the power and glory it had enjoyed hundreds of years before. This meant

eliminating outside influences and anyone who was not pure Cambodian.

Considering the Buddhism religion as incompatible with his program, he ordered Buddhist monks throughout the country murdered and their monasteries destroyed. A Khmer Rouge official would later explain that the Cambodian people had simply stopped believing in Buddhism and that the monks then abandoned the temples and monasteries. "The problem gradually becomes extinguished," she said. "Hence, there is no problem." Other groups in Cambodia were also systematically identified and targeted for destruction—including Chinese, Vietnamese, and Muslims. From 1975 to 1979, anyone who was not a pure Cambodian lived a precarious existence.

Ung and her family continued to work in their village, where she struggled through the days with the gnawing pain of hunger. One night, while most of the family was asleep, Ung heard her mother and father talking very quietly. The Khmer Rouge, her father told her mother, had learned of his position in the former government. So many neighbors had already vanished, and he knew that he would be next. Ung's father suggested they try to send the children to separate orphanages, where they wouldn't inform on one another and might be safe from the soldiers. Ung's mother pleaded that they were still too young, and Ung's father partially agreed. "Not now, but soon," he said.

During the next evening, Ung was admiring a lovely sunset when she saw two men dressed in black and carrying rifles approach their hut. They asked for her father. When he came out of the hut, they told him that their ox wagon was stuck in the mud a mile or two away. They needed him to help pull the wagon out.

Ung's father asked if he could have a moment with his

family. One of the soldiers nodded. He entered the hut with Ung's mother, and in a moment, Ung heard her mother quietly weeping. He reappeared through the hut door.

"Opposite the soldiers, Pa straightens his shoulders, and for the first time since the Khmer Rouge takeover, he stands tall," Ung later wrote.

Thrusting out his chin and holding his head high, he tells the soldiers he is ready to go. Looking up he clenches his teeth. I reach up my hand and lightly tug at his pant leg. I want him to feel better about leaving us. Pa puts his hand on my head and tousles my hair. Suddenly he surprises me and picks me up off the ground. His arms tight around me, Pa holds me and kisses my hair.

"My beautiful girl," he said. "I have to go away with these two men for a while."

Ung's father said good-bye to the rest of his children and then walked away with the two soldiers.

Ung never saw her father again, and by the time the Khmer Rouge were driven from power by an invasion from neighboring Vietnam in early 1979, her mother and youngest sister had been killed. This personal tragedy took place against the backdrop of a much larger crime: an estimated two million people had been either murdered or starved to death. Thousands of bodies were found in mass graves, the individuals either shot or bludgeoned. The invading Vietnamese soldiers uncovered a prison in Phnom Penh where sixteen thousand Cambodians had been tortured and killed for allegedly plotting against Pol Pot's regime. This prison, Tuol Sleng, also contained photographs of the prisoners before they were executed. They are the last, searing images of individuals who, within minutes or hours, would be dead.



What was once a lush landscape of rice fields and palm trees is now a desolate wasteland. The image shows the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge regime's policies, which led to the deaths of millions of people.

The search for truth and justice is a long and difficult process. It requires the cooperation of the government and the people. The image shows a group of people, some of whom are victims of the Khmer Rouge regime, standing in front of a large pile of skulls.



News of the events in Cambodia had been circulating through the international community for years. The United States, however, was still recovering from its painful reverse in Vietnam. Sending soldiers back into the region, which some argued for, could not gain broad support. For most Americans, the whole region was best forgotten or ignored.

However, when the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia, the United States sided with the Khmer Rouge, arguing that no country should invade another. The United States also hoped to keep favor with China, which supported the Khmer Rouge regime. In addition, the United States still considered Vietnam an enemy. Thus, despite evidence of genocide, the United States and China supported the Khmer Rouge as it fought against the new government. The Khmer Rouge continued to sit in the United Nations as the representative of Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge leaders, unlike many of the top Nazi officials in Germany, faced virtually no prosecution for their crimes.

The Convention Is Ratified

Proxmire continued to rise each day in the Senate to speak about the genocide convention. By 1980 he had given more than two thousand separate speeches, and no end seemed in sight. The arguments against the convention rarely changed. Conservatives did not believe it was in the United States' best interest to be entangled in treaties of any kind, and they pointed out that the nation's track record on human rights and the law left nothing to be ashamed of.

However, this stance exposed the United States to critics. When the United States criticized the Soviet Union for human rights abuses, the Soviet Union smugly referred back to the

genocide treaty. How can you criticize us, they asked, when you have failed to sign one of the most basic treaties on human rights? These kinds of exchanges became more important after Ronald Reagan entered the White House in 1981. President Reagan was a fierce opponent of Communism, and he was not afraid to say so. He used strongly moral language, identifying the Soviet Union as an "evil empire."

In 1985, however, Reagan made a serious blunder. As part of a trip to West Germany to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the end of World War II, Reagan was to visit a cemetery in Bitburg. Among the many buried there were forty-nine Nazi Waffen SS officials. When this was discovered, it caused an uproar. How could a U.S. president, the leader of the free world, honor men who served in the SS? Reagan's aides tried to defend him, saying that the visit would help heal the wounds of the

war. In any case, they said, Reagan was to meet with the West German leader, Helmut Kohl, and changing the trip would cause enormous political embarrassment for both leaders.

When he heard this, Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel was scathing. "The issue here is not politics, but good and evil. And we must never confuse them," he told Reagan. For Reagan, who had used similar language to describe the Soviet Union, the rebuke was stinging. However, Reagan would not back down. Ultimately, he visited the cemetery and a concentration camp, despite protests.

Then there was another development. Suddenly the White House grew very interested in the genocide convention. Though previous presidents had spoken in favor of the genocide treaty in principal, it was Reagan who provided the necessary support to get it passed. Conservatives were aware that Reagan's support meant the treaty would be accepted, but they were determined to water down provisions that made U.S. citizens susceptible to the International Court of Justice. This organization had been formed to prosecute perpetrators of war crimes and genocide. To the conservatives, however, it meant a world court that could prosecute Americans, and they considered this a serious threat to U.S. sovereignty.

In February 1986, the United States became the ninety-eighth nation to ratify the treaty. The opposing senators, however, had succeeded in making the treaty much weaker than originally planned. This debate about the role of a world court would deepen over the next decade.

chapter seven

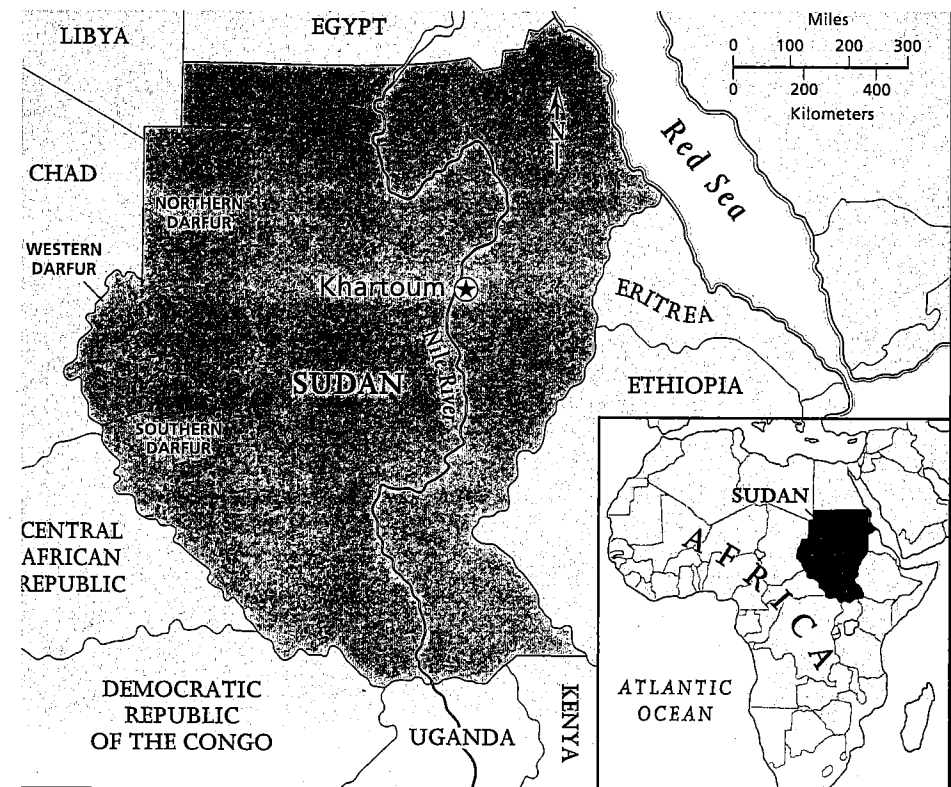
the tribes of darfur, sudan

It is certain that the debate has not finished. The newspapers have been full of stories about another genocide—this one in Sudan, a giant country in Africa that lies just south of Egypt. BBC journalist Fergal Keane wrote, “More than two million people have been uprooted. Hundreds of thousands, nobody really knows how many, have been killed. Thousands of women have been raped.”

For almost twenty years, Sudan has been torn by civil war between the central government and rebels in the southern region of the country. The central reason for the conflict is oil, which is concentrated in the south and is mostly controlled by rebel groups. In 2003, however, due largely to U.S. pressure, peace talks between the two groups made advances. They formed a tentative plan for a new government and an agreement on how to divide income from the oil. But just as this war appeared to be resolved, another conflict flared up in Sudan’s western region—Darfur.

Darfur’s inhabitants are usually one of two groups—farmers or nomads. The differences between the groups are mainly cultural. Also, the farmers tend to be more African and the nomads more Arab. Both, however, are mostly Muslim, and both have lived in the region for centuries. Casually observed, an outsider may find it difficult to tell them apart.

But over the past fifteen years, friction between these



This map shows the location of the Darfur region in Sudan.

groups has increased. The nomads moved about the country with their herds, trampling the fields of farmers. Some farmers also own animals, which compete for food and space with the nomad's animals. Making everything worse, the population has grown and land has become scarce.

The farmers have also resented how the government has treated Darfur. The top local government positions seem to go only to candidates with Arab backgrounds. Also, the Khartoum regime appears to ignore Darfur, and no government money for roads, hospitals, or schools comes to the region. The tensions between these two groups escalated.

Another Genocide

The spark occurred in early 2003. After seeing the Khartoum government make peace with the southern rebels, some tribes in Darfur concluded that they could also use armed rebellion to make the government address their concerns. The Darfur rebels weren't taken seriously in Khartoum until they struck and overwhelmed an army post on April 25, 2003.

Shocked, the government moved quickly to crush the rebels, focusing on three Darfur tribes who were responsible for the protests. To carry out this task, the government gave weapons to local Arab militia groups and supported them with army soldiers and air force gunships. Among the most feared militia groups were nomads called Janjaweed (the word comes from Arabic—*jan* means "evil" in Arabic; *jawad* means "horse"). These forces began a vicious campaign against farming villages in Darfur.



Armed Janjaweed militia ride their horses in the Western Darfur region of Sudan.

Without warning, villages were bombed and strafed by Sudanese airplanes. Then trucks loaded with soldiers, followed by columns of Janjaweed on camels and horses, surrounded and attacked the villages. In some cases, the villagers would flee and only lose their food, animals, and homes. In others the soldiers and Janjaweed slaughtered the men and boys and raped the women. After hours marked by screams, explosions, and bursts of gunfire, the Sudanese forces looted the villages and set the wood huts aflame.

The Janjaweed, their horses and camels loaded with furniture, rugs, and other loot, vanished back into the countryside. The trucks carrying soldiers drove off on the dirt roads, leaving behind smoking ruins and corpses, many of them thrown into wells to foul the water. Another village had been wiped out, and the process was sure to be repeated again. Flying over the region, observers could see the black smudges of destroyed villages scattered across the landscape.

Over the next year, details of what was happening in Darfur were gradually reported in the international press. Hundreds of thousands of refugees fled the region and told stories of villages bombed and the male inhabitants shot down before their eyes. The refugees, many of them starving, gathered in wretched camps. Human rights groups began labeling the Janjaweed action "ethnic cleansing," a term used earlier in Bosnia. The groups called for the government to allow humanitarian aid into the country and for the refugees be permitted to return to their homes safely.

On April 7, 2004, Kofi Annan brought up the crisis in a speech commemorating the tenth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide. "The international community cannot stand idle," he told his audience. "The risk of genocide remains frighteningly real." The government in Khartoum dismissed Annan's



A young boy looks over all that remains of his home after the Janjaweed forces attacked his village in 2004.

comments, while rebel groups appealed for an international force to enforce peace in the country. Still, however, the atrocities kept occurring.

As the criticism of the Khartoum government grew, the government insisted that the stories of rapes and murders were exaggerated, the result of undisciplined soldiers in wartime, or simply a local tribal conflict. When negative news continued to be reported, however, the government promised it would halt and disarm the Janjaweed.

But the reports only grew worse. On July 30, 2004, the UN Security Council passed a resolution that threatened to consider sanctions if the Janjaweed were not curtailed. On September 9, 2004, U.S. secretary of state Colin Powell told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that "genocide has been committed in

Darfur and that the government of Sudan and the Janjaweed bear responsibility—and genocide may still be occurring.” The U.S. State Department reported on the same day that 1.2 million people have been forced to flee from their homes and that 405 villages had been destroyed.

Darfurian survivors gathered in camps, many exhausted and traumatized, and humanitarian groups did what they could to help them. The Paris-based group Doctors Without Borders sent medicine and doctors to the region. Dr. Jerry Ehrlich, a sixty-nine-year-old pediatrician from New Jersey, was already a veteran of several humanitarian missions. He had first volunteered his services to the organization in 1991 after reading newspaper stories about Kurds freezing in Kurdistan after the Gulf War. Over

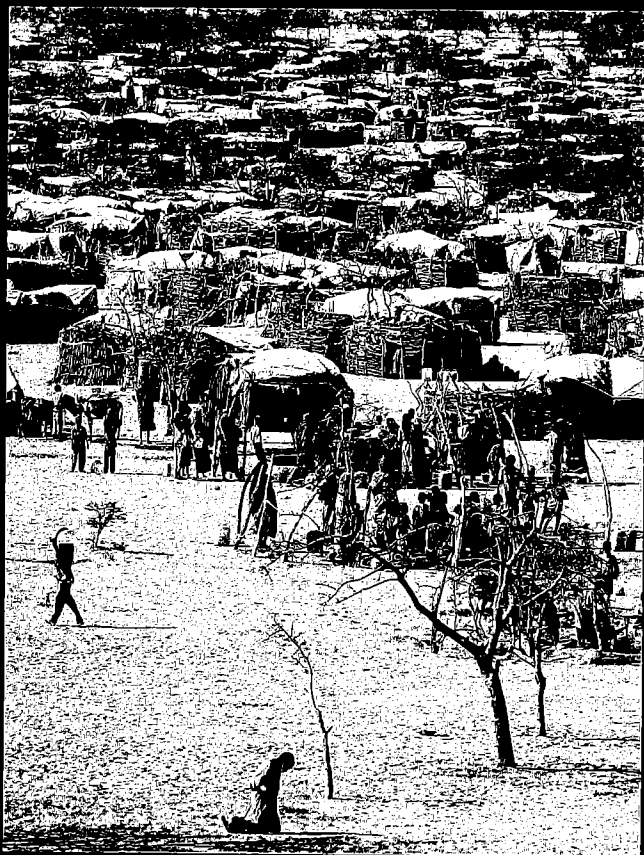
the next fourteen years, Ehrlich spent time treating displaced persons and refugees in Sri Lanka, Haiti, and central Asia. In 2004 Ehrlich arrived in Nyala, a small town in southern Darfur.

Every day he and another doctor were driven several miles to a camp for displaced persons. As the truck bounced along the sandy track, he quietly noticed that more and more people were crowding into the camp. The fields of straw and wood huts, with plastic tarps thrown across the tops to ward off rain, were growing larger. At Kalma, the camp where Ehrlich spent most of his time, the population was forty-five thousand. When he left two months later, he estimated it had risen to seventy-five thousand.

The region had become a humanitarian crisis. Ehrlich saw hundreds of patients every day. Most of them, Ehrlich said, were either traumatized from what they had seen, malnourished from lack of food, or exhausted after fleeing dozens of miles. The agony was not just physical, he recalled. “The mothers, you look at their faces and you know they have a problem,” he said. “It’s post-traumatic stress disorder. They had seen their husbands beaten, or killed in front of them. Many of them were victims of gang rape.”

Many of the children hadn’t eaten well for weeks or months, said Ehrlich, making them especially vulnerable to diseases. A measles epidemic killed more than one in four children in the camp. Each week, remembered Ehrlich, a humanitarian worker would go to a nearby cemetery to count the lengthening rows of graves.

While Ehrlich spent most of his time treating children, he gave out more than just advice and medicine. He had also brought to Darfur twenty-five boxes of crayons and four hundred pieces of construction paper. He gave some of his young patients crayons, sheets of paper, and told them to “have fun”—draw whatever they wanted to.



Ehrlich said he wanted the drawings partly as a memento of his time in Darfur and partly to help the children entertain themselves. "The kids sat in the hospital, sat in the camps," he recalled. "And they had nothing to do."



Jerry Ehrlich poses with a refugee child and her drawing

Many of the children came back days or even weeks later to give Ehrlich their drawings. He thanked them and gave them either a hug or a handshake. Then, knowing that the images could be confiscated by the Sudanese authorities, he quickly stashed them in his bag. Later, back in his dormitory, he glanced at them before storing them safely between the pages of a Sunday New York Times.

When Ehrlich left Sudan at the end of July, he carried 167 drawings with him. Back home in New Jersey, where he finally had time to examine the drawings closely, he saw horrible images through the children's eyes—of burning huts, gun-wielding soldiers, and villagers being shot. "What can I tell you?" he said when asked how the drawings made him feel. "You could cry."

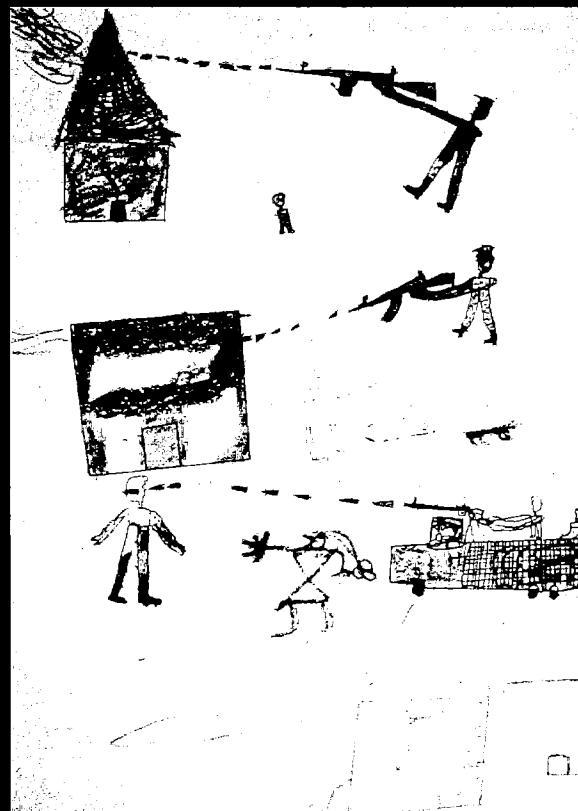
Ehrlich was aware of drawings made by Jewish children during the Holocaust that depicted similar violent images. The Holocaust drawings, which have been preserved, had impressed Ehrlich enormously. To him, they were vital historical documents and indisputable evidence of the atrocities that had occurred. He felt that the Darfur drawings could serve a similar purpose.

"It was proof that this was happening," he said. "Here you have some innocent kids, and this is what this child is drawing. Here you have a child's view of what's going on—through his eyes, through his mind."

This, he said, presented an opportunity. "I knew when I left Darfur I was not going to walk away without attempting to create public awareness," he said. "When I looked at those pictures, I knew I had to do something. I had to get them exhibited, viewed."

Through the help of a church, the drawings were mounted in an exhibit in Philadelphia in December 2004. After the show, which drew considerable local media and public interest ("The church was packed to the gills," remembered Ehrlich), the drawings were sent on tour, where they have been shown in dozens of shows to raise consciousness of what was happening in Darfur. Ehrlich often went to give talks on what he had seen.

At these talks, which he continues to do, Ehrlich meets many people who are determined to do something about the situation, but Ehrlich also feels some disappointment. His



These are two of the disturbing images that were created by Darfurese children who had witnessed the genocide in Darfur. The drawing at the top shows airplanes bombing burning houses and dead bodies. In the drawing to the right, notice the small child cowering the top, caught between gunfire.

audience is often disturbed and shocked by what he says—which to him is not necessarily a good thing. “The awareness isn’t there,” he said. “If you could end this conflict a month earlier, you have no idea how many lives could be saved.”

Another person who felt impelled to do something about Darfur was a teenage high school student from northern New Jersey. Arielle Wisotsky was visiting the Holocaust Memorial Museum with her mother in Washington, D.C. As she was exiting the main exhibit on the Holocaust, she noticed a poster and several flyers that spoke of a new genocide—in Darfur.

“I was kind of shocked—I had never heard about it,” the seventeen-year-old said. “And it’s genocide, and I was kind of surprised that no one really knows about it.”

Wisotsky, whose grandmother had survived the Holocaust, pondered ways to help the situation. “I knew I wanted to help, but I didn’t know how,” she said. The obvious plan seemed to raise money somehow and donate it. “But I wanted to do more.”

Like Ehrlich, Wisotsky believed that a large part of the problem was the lack of recognition. In fall 2005, she and two friends founded a nonprofit organization called Help Darfur Now. She printed flyers and sent them to family, friends, and members of the surrounding community.

Wisotsky participated in a march with other Darfur groups in Morristown, New Jersey. She has written to members of Congress, asking for meetings on the issue, and planned a school assembly. The group has raised more than \$25,000, and in February 2006, presented a check to Doctors Without Borders for \$15,000. The organization has expanded to include twenty-five satellite chapters (other middle and high school students in various parts of the United States have opened chapters of Help Darfur Now).

“I feel that it’s working,” she said. “Not a lot of people at my school knew about it; now they do. It feels good to be helping.”

Getting Away with Murder

At the end of 2005, the genocide in Darfur continued. A seven-thousand-member force from a group of African nations—called the African Union—were sent to the region, but they lacked the numbers or equipment to alter the situation on the ground. In December 2005, the U.S. Congress rejected a last-minute plea from U.S. secretary of state Condoleezza Rice to appropriate \$50 million to support the group. While the U.S. government has used extremely strong language to describe the events in Sudan, it didn't appear willing to do anything of true consequence—such as send in ground troops (this was also unlikely because of the conflict in Iraq).

On December 13, 2005, the Sudan government barred international investigators from entering the country to collect



A rebel soldier observed the remains of a dead African war tale, undisturbed in a field of tall grass, a grim reminder of the atrocities committed by the Darfur war.

evidence on alleged war crimes. The presence of the International Criminal Court, insisted Sudanese officials, is unnecessary. "We have the national law authority," Sudanese minister of justice Muhammad Ali al-Mardi told the BBC. "The government is willing and able to try these cases."

At the United Nations, however, the mood was less confident. The humanitarian chief, Jan Egeland, has said that rapes, killings, and forced displacements were still occurring. In addition, the situation has become so dangerous that organizations may be forced to withdraw. And others see the situation in Sudan as already another failure—a name that can be added to a terrible list of atrocities that no one had the power or the resolve to stop.

"For all the epic quality of this tragedy, it feels like a very old script. We have been here before," wrote BBC journalist Fergal Keane, listing the various phrases that world leaders use to describe genocide. Besides "never again," he says, there is "we must learn the lessons." With growing disgust, Keane wrote a speech typical of public statements made by world leaders today. "We must learn the lessons of the Holocaust, or of Cambodia, or of Bosnia, or of Rwanda . . . and make sure that things like this . . . and you know how this sentence ends . . . 'things like this never happen again.'"

Bill Schulz, executive director of Amnesty International USA in New York, was far more angry. "How far have we really come [since the genocide in Rwanda]?" he asked. "The Sudanese government has been emboldened by international inaction. They think they can get away with murder, and frankly there's every reason to believe they are right."