

MODULE #1 HANDOUT: MASS ATROCITY DEFINITIONS

Mass Atrocity: While *mass atrocity* is not defined in international law, the term generally refers to “large-scale, systematic violence against civilian populations.”¹

Genocide: According to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, *genocide* means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, as such:

- 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

Crimes against Humanity: According to the Rome Statute, a *crime against humanity* means any of the following acts when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack:

- Murder
- Extermination
- Enslavement
- Deportation or forcible transfer of population
- Imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty in violation of fundamental rules of international law
- Torture
- Rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity
- Persecution against any identifiable group or collectivity on political, racial, national, ethnic, cultural, religious, gender (which, for the purposes of the Rome Statute, is understood to refer to “the two sexes, male and female, within the context of society”), or other grounds that are universally recognized as impermissible under international law, in connection with any act referred to in this list or any crime within the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court

¹ Scott Straus, [Fundamentals of Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention](#) (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2016), 31.

MODULE 1: WHAT ARE MASS ATROCITIES?

- Enforced disappearance of persons
- The crime of Apartheid
- Other inhumane acts of a similar character intentionally causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health

War Crimes are those violations of the law of war that incur individual criminal responsibility under international law, including, for example, willful killing of civilians, torture, unlawful transfer or deportation, willful killing of prisoners of war, wanton destruction of property not justified by military necessity, perfidy, or hostage-taking.

See the grave breaches provisions of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, GC I Articles 50, GC II Article 51, GC III Article 130, and GC IV Article 147.

Ethnic Cleansing has no definition in international law and is not defined as an international crime, yet many legal practitioners consider ethnic cleansing as one of the types of mass atrocities. Ethnic cleansing generally refers to the forced removal of an ethnic group from a territory for the purpose of changing that territory's ethnic composition.