

## 27 JANUARY

Every year on 27 January, Denmark holds Auschwitz Day – the official Danish commemoration day for the Holocaust and other genocides.

The purpose of Auschwitz Day is to further public debate and education on genocide. Along with a range of other countries with similar commemoration days, Denmark signals that we have an obligation not to forget the victims and the crimes committed. The hope is to learn from history through information and debate – which is crucial if we are to prevent future genocides.



## GENOCIDE – FAR AWAY?

Genocides take place far away from our daily goings, but the media bring images of violence, death and destruction into our living rooms. During the war in Bosnia in the 1990s, we became witnesses to ethnic cleansing only a few hours' flight from Copenhagen. We also come face to face with the victims of violence when refugees arrive in Denmark. Some Danes come especially close to war and crimes when they go to the hot spots of the world as emergency aid workers, nurses and UN soldiers. In 2005 and 2006, Denmark has a seat in the UN Security Council and will have direct influence on any decision to act against genocide.



*Who are the perpetrators of genocide, and why do they do what they do?*



## AUSCHWITZ DAY

We can learn from all genocides. For that reason, Auschwitz Day focuses on different genocides to obtain a better insight into why they are committed and how they can be prevented.

Auschwitz Day marks the anniversary for the liberation of the extermination camp Auschwitz in 1945. Concerning the name of the commemoration day, former Chief Rabbi Bent Melchior says: "The term 'Auschwitz' has gained universal meaning. Really, it encompasses all forms of mass murder, ethnic cleansing and all collective crimes against people, whose only crime is to be born into or having joined the 'wrong' group. In our mind, Auschwitz, originally a European phenomenon, covers atrocities in all parts of

the world."

Around the country, municipalities hold special arrangements to mark Auschwitz Day. There are talks by survivors and emergency aid workers, film viewings, concerts and plays. Read more on this on [www.27-1.dk](http://www.27-1.dk).

## WHAT IS GENOCIDE?

A UN convention from 1948 defines genocide as crimes intended to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group of people. Genocide is a crime against humanity and concerns all of us, exactly because it is an attempt to erase part of mankind.



*If people on the run  
were to knock on  
your door tonight,  
would you help them?*



## CENTURY OF GENOCIDE

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, close to one hundred million people lost their lives as a consequence of ethnic cleansing and genocide. Right now, hundreds of thousands of civilians are in the middle of a humanitarian catastrophe in Sudan, fleeing from government-supported militias who rape, kill and burn villages in the Darfur province.

There are examples of genocide and crimes against humanity in all time periods and parts of the world. In the Ottoman Empire, Armenians were massacred, and in the Soviet Union, Stalin's regime terrorised the population in order to cleanse out the 'enemies of the people'. During World War Two, the Nazi regime attempted systematically to exterminate the Jews of Europe. Also Gypsies, Slavs and Soviet prisoners of war died because of the Nazi

racial ideology. The communist revolution by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia spread repression, famine and death throughout the country, and in Iraq, Saddam Hussein used toxic gas against the Iraqi Kurds. Back in Europe, the former Yugoslavia set the scene for extensive ethnic cleansing, whilst Hutus in Rwanda over a brief period of time killed most of the country's Tutsi minority.

Most of these crimes have faded into history unpunished. The 1990s, however, became a turning point. The UN established war crimes tribunals for both the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, and at the turn of the millennium the international community founded a permanent international criminal court.

1915-1917	Armenia
1928 - 1953	Stalin's Soviet Union
1941 - 1945	The Holocaust
1948	UN Genocide Convention
1975 - 1979	Cambodia
1988	Iraq
1992 - 1995	Bosnia
1994	Rwanda
1998	The International Criminal Court
2003 -	Darfur ?



*Can victims and perpetrators be reconciled after genocide?*



## EDUCATION

Auschwitz Day is also about looking ahead and learning from the past. Therefore, education plays a prominent part. The Danish Institute for International Studies in cooperation with the Ministry of Education offers among others a series of seminars and two educational websites: [www.folkedrab.dk](http://www.folkedrab.dk) and [www.folkedrab.dk/lung](http://www.folkedrab.dk/lung) for high schools and middle schools respectively. The websites contain articles on genocide with discussion questions, sources and annotated suggestions for further reading and links. During the seminars, students from upper secondary schools participate in workshops where genocides from a variety of countries and time periods are discussed from different angles.

“When people know what happened, they will want to understand why it happened. Trying to understand why genocides happen may yield more questions than answers.

Despite the frustration of too many questions and not enough answers, the search for truth and justice remains for me an inspiration in life. Succumbing to the pangs of my tragedy would be the delight for the perpetrators of the Rwandese genocide..

They killed my children; I will not let them kill my soul too.”

- Marcel Rudasingwa who lost five children during the genocide in Rwanda in 1994

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**Further information**

Department for Holocaust and Genocide  
Studies,

Danish Institute for International Studies  
[www.diiis.dk](http://www.diiis.dk)

Institute for Human Rights  
[www.humanrights.dk](http://www.humanrights.dk)

*Learn more about Auschwitz Day at [www.27-1.dk](http://www.27-1.dk)*

*or send an email to [folkedrab@diiis.dk](mailto:folkedrab@diiis.dk)*

**Photos**

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