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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,  
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANISATION

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G E N O C I D E

(English)

Talk by Professor Raphael Lemkin

(Duration: 5'36")

NOTE: Professor Raphael Lemkin, authority on international law and instructor at Yale University, has drawn the attention of the entire world through his long struggle to arouse the conscience of mankind against the crime which he has labelled "genocide" - the deliberate mass extinction of human groups. After fifteen years of single-handed work, he has succeeded in convincing the governments of the world of the justice of his cause, and the 58 Member States of the United Nations General Assembly, meeting in Paris, adopted the convention making Genocide an international crime, and perpetrators of this blot on history liable to punishment not only by national courts but by international tribunals. The results of Dr. Lemkin's work have been termed a milestone in the field of international co-operation.

## GENOCIDE

Out of the deliberations of the United Nations Assembly in Paris came a legal document of great international importance. It is a Convention on the crime of Genocide, which is the intentional destruction of racial, religious, national and ethnic groups. Hitherto the Convention of Genocide was referred to as a draft Convention, which means it was a hope, an aspiration. Now it is no longer a draft and a hope. It is a treaty and a living force in international life. It has been adopted by 58 nations, signed in a record time of 3 days by 21 nations, and now awaiting ratification through the parliaments of the world.

What does this new international law mean? To put it bluntly, the existence of those human groups which, throughout history, have been under attack by either governments or other human groups, blinded by hatred and intolerance, became a matter of international concern, and legal protection has been granted to those who, until now, appealed in vain, in distress and danger, for rescue which never came. Who doesn't remember the tragic fate of the Herrerros in Africa who were burned together with their cattle at the turn of the century so that, out of a people of 80,000, less than 10,000 survived. Whether the victims were called Huguenots, Waldenses, early Christians, Jews, Christian Assyrians, Armenians, Poles, Gypsies, Slavs of different nationalities, whether the attack was directed in the dark Middle Ages or in our own enlightened times, there have always been two tragic questions. Are these people crying for help entitled to international protection, and, if such protection comes, does it interfere with the right of a state to do whatever it pleases with its own citizens?

There were tragic and unbelievably telling examples of appeals for help against Genocide. In one case, a boat of a great power came to rescue victims

of Genocide, and the victims were trying to reach the boat, fleeing from the shore into the water and drowning by thousands before they could be rescued. There is another case which makes us realise how late the law of Genocide came. Under Czar Nicholas I, ferocious persecutions and pogroms were instigated against the Jews of Czarist Russia. No help came from outside. The Jews then appealed to God in a most direct way. Being deeply religious and believing in life after death, they used to put in the grave of every Jew a letter written to God in which they would say, "God, our sufferings are unbearable. This man in the grave is without sin, and we hope he will appear before you and be the messenger of our sufferings. Listen to him and help". When the Czarist authorities finally found out about these letters they ordered court martials of the writers of these letters.

Now, owing to the initiative of the United Nations, and because of the awakening of the feeling for universal solidarity in protecting basic values of our civilisation, we have achieved this treaty on Genocide which is a law with teeth. Individuals and governments guilty of Genocide will be held responsible for their crimes, not only before their own courts but also before international bodies such as the organs of the United Nations and before the International Criminal Court which is provided for in principle, and whose creation is left to further action of the United Nations. The International Court of Justice will be called upon to pass on every violation of the Convention on Genocide.

The unanimity with which the United Nations has adopted the Convention on Genocide shows that there is a real possibility of mobilising spiritual forces of all nations, despite political and ideological differences, for the protection of basic values of our civilisation.

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