

## PART ONE: THE HISTORICAL RECORD

### DEFINITIONS

The working definition used by the first author to identify episodes of genocides parallels the Genocide Convention adopted in December 1948. Genocides and politicides *are the promotion, execution and/or implied consent of sustained policies by governing elites and their agents—or in the case of civil war, either of the contending authorities—that result in the death of a substantial portion of a communal, political or politicized ethnic group.* In genocides the victimized groups are defined primarily in terms of their communal characteristics. In politicides, by contrast, groups are defined primarily in terms of their political opposition to the regime and dominant groups.

- The Genocide Convention prohibits “killing members of the group” and “deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or part.” The definition used in this study excludes that part of the Convention which prohibits actions “causing serious...mental harm to members of the group” because this encompasses a great many groups that have lost their cohesion and identity, but not their lives, as a result of processes of socio-economic change.
- The Genocide Convention does not include groups of victims defined by their political positions and actions. Raphael Lemkin—a tireless advocate for passage of the Convention and responsible for coining the term—did advocate the inclusion of political groups. For political reasons, however, the final draft of the Convention omitted any reference to political mass murder, not least to get the USSR and its allies to support the document. We coined the concept of politicide, now widely used by other researchers, to identify cases with politically-defined victims. Scholars who have done case studies of recent genocides argue that the Convention’s definition does not fit well any major genocide since WW II. This is not surprising because the original definition is closely tied to the Holocaust. The point can be illustrated by applying the Convention’s definition to the Cambodian genocide (1975-78). Most victims of the Khmer Rouge were other Khmers—real or imagined class enemies, hence politically defined groups. The genocide victims were the small Cham minority (Muslims), Vietnamese and ethnic Chinese. The episode was a politicide not a genocide, and if we were to exclude Khmers from consideration we could not account for the vast majority of the estimated 2 to 3 million victims.