



Statement on the Bangladesh Genocide of 1971

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On the 50th Anniversary of the Liberation War and the birth of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, the Lemkin Institute issues a formal statement for the recognition of the genocide committed towards the Bengali nation during the war for independence.

After the British colonial partition of 1947, East Pakistan, today's Bangladesh, remained under the rule of West Pakistan. The partition was based on religious identity -- India became majority Hindu and Pakistan majority Muslim. Although the eastern part of Bengal was given to Pakistan because the majority of its people were Muslim, the West Pakistan government, the center of political, military and administrative power in postcolonial Pakistan, perceived Bengalis as being influenced by Hindus, and, therefore, not "true Muslims."

Due to this perception of Bengalis as a different ethnic, religious, and national group, West Pakistan established discriminatory policies with the intent to destroy their cultural and national identity and impose on them a singular West Pakistan identity. Amongst those policies were the prohibition against speaking Bangla, the imposition of Urdu as an official language, and the violent persecution and repression of a linguistic and cultural opposition that had started right after the partition. During this period of time, many social movements expressing Bengali cultural and national identity were born, such as the "Language Movement" and the "Six-Points Movement," an antecedent to the call for independence.

The genocidal policies of the postcolonial era became expressed in extreme and mass physical violence throughout the entire process of the Liberation War, from its very beginning, when West Pakistan implemented "Operation Searchlight," to the end of the war, when West Pakistan, facing defeat, proceeded to kill thousands of Bengali intellectuals. The atrocities committed by the Pakistani army and the local collaborators - such as razakars, Al Badr and Al Shams - included a systematic policy of sexual violence against Bengalis, the majority of them Bengali Hindu women and girls, involving vicious gang rapes, life force atrocities, sexual slavery, sexual torture, and forced maternity.

The Pakistani Army and local collaborators targeted hundreds of intellectuals from the very beginning of the war through to the infamous events of 14 December 1971, now known as "Martyred Intellectuals Day" in the memory of those who were abducted, killed and buried in mass graves. As in other contexts of emergent nationalist movements, Bengali intellectuals were the icons of cultural resistance against oppression: they initiated protest movements against the racist

military regime of Pakistan and articulated demands based in the right to self-determination of the Bengali national group. Amongst those intellectuals who were killed were journalists, philosophers, poets, musicians, writers, professors, film-makers, lawyers, doctors and many other individuals who represented the different aspects of the Bengali identity.

The Lemkin Institute also wishes to highlight the efforts carried out by Bangladesh to bring justice to the victims and accountability for perpetrators by establishing the International Crimes Tribunals of Bangladesh in order to try the Bengali nationals that collaborated with the Pakistani government in perpetrating genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. Judicial accountability must be at the core of any transitional justice and preventative efforts, and the international community should give support to national processes.

Given the lack of a broad international recognition of this crime, the Lemkin Institute calls upon the international community, including the United Nations, to urgently recognize the Bengali genocide as a way to pay tribute to the victims and to hold perpetrators accountable. The Lemkin Institute also calls upon the international community to provide help and support to Bangladesh in its justice efforts, as well as to pressure Pakistan to work with Bangladesh in its search for truth and justice.